

THE IDENTITY AND ORGANIZATION OF GOSPEL CITY MOVEMENTS  
IN THE UNITED STATES

A THESIS-PROJECT  
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To Kim – my songbird who refuses to let us live life  
without hearing the songs of spiritual melodies.

What is needed is a theology as big as the city

– Ray Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City*

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

CI: Collective Impact.

DSS: Department of Social Security.

FSG: Foundation Strategy Group.

GAIN: Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition.

GCM: Gospel City Movement.

MOU: Memorandum of Understanding.

TBC: Transforming the Bay with Christ.

WCC: World Council of Churches.

WEA: World Evangelical Alliance.

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this research project was (1) to clarify the common identity and shared features of gospel city movements (GCMs) in the U.S., and (2) to discern the perceived applicability and usefulness of the collective impact (CI) model to current largescale movements. This study was grounded in a theology of the city which was constructed through a biblical survey of the metanarrative of Scripture. A phenomenological qualitative research method was used, and a purposeful sample procedure identified seven major GCMs in the U.S. that were included in this project.

Individual in-depth interviews were conducted with the executive leaders of each GCM, and inductive analysis revealed five themes most pertinent to the research objectives: (a) GCMs practice local orientation within particular city contexts, (b) GCMs share purposeful unity for city transformation, (c) GCMs engage their cities with a holistic gospel, (d) GCMs incorporate the laity as integral to the movement, and (e) GCMs express central operating characteristics.

Based on this research project, five areas of implications were suggested for present-day GCMs: (1) understanding GCMs as supernatural and natural response, (2) considering GCMs as revitalization movements, (3) appreciating the diversity and commonality of GCMs, (4) assessing what is currently needed in GCMs, and (5) advancing intentional conversation among GCMs. Limitations of the current study and recommendations for future research are also presented.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

#### Introduction

The world is becoming increasingly urban. At the time of the 2010 census, 80.7% of the U.S. population lived in urban areas, and the top 48 urbanized areas accounted for more than half of the entire urban population.<sup>1</sup> The increasing trend toward urbanization is both a national and a global phenomenon. According to the Population Reference Bureau, in 1900 only 14% of the world's population lived in urban areas. By 1950, this number grew to 30%. In 2011, a tipping point occurred when the world became 51% urban. By 2050, it is estimated that the world population will be nearly 70% urban.<sup>2</sup>

The reality of urbanization has generated tremendous missiological implications. An entire field of urban missiology has begun to build out around the fresh cry that “The greatest need of our day is for the gospel to enliven first our hearts, and then, our cities.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nate Berg, City Lab, “U.S. Urban Population is up... But What Does ‘Urban’ Really Mean?” City Lab, <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2012/03/us-urban-population-what-does-urban-really-mean/1589/>, accessed February 26, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations News, “Around 2.5 Billion More People Will Be Living in Cities by 2050, Projects New UN Report,” <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/05/1009852>, accessed January 14, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Josh Dennis, *Christ + City: Why the Greatest Need of the City is the Greatest News of All* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 98.

A new and careful analysis of city missiology is needed. While this need has recently become acute, in reality it has been precipitating for some time. Our current need for a refocused urban missiology can be understood as an outcropping of what some prophetic missiologists have articulated in prior generations. As early as the 1950's, Lesslie Newbigin began to anticipate the enormous effects that urbanization would have on humanity, along with the peculiar challenges and opportunities that this would present for the Church. Newbigin recounted that: "Civilization is experiencing a sort of atomizing process, in which the individual is more and more set free from his natural setting in family and neighborhood and becomes a replaceable unit in the social machine."<sup>4</sup> Newbigin argued that these social trajectories led to the emergence of the modern city. For Newbigin, the modern city thus became the locale into which:

Myriads of human beings, loosened from their old ties of village, cast or tribe, are ceaselessly churned around in the whirlpool of the city – anonymous, identical, replaceable units. In such a situation it is natural that man should long for some sort of community, for man cannot be human without it. It is especially natural that Christians should reach out for that doctrine which speaks of the true God-given community, the Church of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

This "God-given community" – the Church within the city, refers to the collective people of God rather than independent local churches, which Newbigin went on to describe as "The visible company of those who have been called by Him into the fellowship of His Son."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God* (New York, NY: Friendship Press, 1954), 13.

<sup>5</sup> Newbigin, *The Household of God*, 13.

<sup>6</sup> Newbigin, *The Household of God*, 29.

The modern social trend of urbanization is of a certain kind, namely, one that is accompanied by globalization. In 2013, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs found that international immigrants worldwide reached an all-time historical high at 232 million people, 46 million of which live in the U.S.<sup>7</sup> Modern urbanization, which is concurrently laden with globalization, has brought unique challenges and opportunities into our current missiological realities. Specifically, urbanization in concert with globalization has carried unprecedented religious and cultural diversity into our cities. Reflecting on the nature of this new urban-global dynamic that is coming to bear on the missiological map, Ray Bakke has observed that:

As we move away from a world of nations to a world of interconnected multinational cities, it's clear that the frontier of mission has shifted. The majority of the world's non-Christians will not be geographically distant peoples, but culturally distant peoples who often reside together within the shadows of urban spires in the metro areas of every continent.<sup>8</sup>

The social trends of urbanization and globalization, have thus amplified pluralism in the city. It should not be surprising that tolerance and public secularism are growing social emphases, as people with widely diverse cultures, beliefs, and religious commitments live in closer and closer proximity. Today the Church in the city is called into a socio-cultural milieu that is being deeply impacted by the trends of urbanization, globalization, and pluralism.

It is within this milieu of increasingly urbanized-globalized-pluralistic cities, that the need for a unified witness of the gospel becomes even more imperative. To this

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<sup>7</sup> Stephen T. Um, *Why Cities Matter: To God, the Culture, and the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 106.

<sup>8</sup> Ray Bakke, *A Theology As Big As The City* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 43.



point, Vinoth Ramachandra admonishes that, “It is the growing unity of the disciple-community, drawing together people of all cultural and social backgrounds, which will convince sceptics ... If the church is part of the gospel, then it follows that authentic witness can only be ecumenical witness.”<sup>9</sup> In *Transforming Mission*, Bosch also presents his case for an ecumenical missiology as the emerging contemporary paradigm for mission. The essence of his proposal is that “The mutual coordination of mission and unity is non-negotiable.”<sup>10</sup> Even more forcefully, Bosch predicted that ecumenical missiology will encompass the last epoch of mission, and that during this time “The loss of ecclesial unity is not just a vexation but a sin.”<sup>11</sup> He reasoned that, “Opposed to prior Church unity, which had been understood as the result of reaching doctrinal consensus via theological debate, but the world was ignored; in the new style, the interest in church unity was motivated by a concern for the world.”<sup>12</sup>

More recently, Tim Tennent has qualified Bosch’s proposal of ecumenical missiology, by describing a “deeper ecumenism” as a megatrend within modern missiology – “An emergence of post denominational identity among many as well as the emergence of thousands of new denominations, requires the forging of new kinds of unity

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<sup>9</sup> Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission: Beyond the Pluralist Paradigm* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 276.

<sup>10</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 456.

<sup>11</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 460.

<sup>12</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 451.

that transcend traditional denominational and confessional identities.”<sup>13</sup> Tennent argues that this deeper ecumenism goes beyond the broad scope of global ecumenical expressions such as the World Council of Churches, World Evangelical Alliance, and other top-down organizations. Instead, it refers to “A deeper, spiritual unity that acknowledges our catholicity because we are all members of the body of Christ and share a common union with Jesus Christ and a burden to bear witness to Him in authentic ways throughout the whole world.”<sup>14</sup> In keeping with Tennent’s rationale, the need for authenticity in a globalizing world has in turn resulted in a plea for localization. The unique local quality of cities requires a unique missiological response to particular city contexts.

Social theorists and city experts Daniel A. Bell and Avner de-Shalit have corroborated with Tennent’s line of thinking, by expressing that “The desire to experience a sense of uniqueness and particularity seems deeply rooted in human nature. With the decline of national attachments, the best place to look for a supplement (or a replacement) might be ‘down’ to the city rather than ‘up’ to the world.”<sup>15</sup> When Newbigin observes that “The community that confesses that Jesus is Lord has been, from the very beginning, a movement launched into the public life of mankind,” he extolls the

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<sup>13</sup> Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010), 422.

<sup>14</sup> Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 461.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel A. Bell and Avner de-Shalit, *The Spirit of Cities: Why the Identity of a City Matters in a Global Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), xi.

virtue of applying theology to sociological realities.<sup>16</sup> This imperative is encouraging local theologizing to bring contextual answers into the public realities of newly emerging gospel city movements (GCMs).

### **The Emergence of Gospel City Movements**

The pressures of urbanization, globalization, and pluralism are forcing local churches to consider new levels of collaboration with other local churches that hold similar theological and missiological perspectives in order to deal with these realities. As a leading proponent of GCMs, Tim Keller observes, “What it takes to reach a city is a city-wide gospel movement. A (gospel) movement needs the dynamic of cooperation that encourages people of different temperaments and perspectives to come together around their common vision and goals.”<sup>17</sup> Keller has been at the forefront of advocating, theologizing and implementing one such movement in New York City, and using it to help propagate similar movements across the U.S. and throughout the world. The theological vision undergirding these movements is expressed succinctly in three basic commitments: gospel, city, and movement. Keller has emphasized that:

A church or group of churches with movement dynamics generates its own converts, ideas, leaders and resources from within in order to realize its vision of being the church for its city and culture. The more ideas, leaders, and resources that are pooled and deployed, the more the movement dynamic strengthens and

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<sup>16</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 16.

<sup>17</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 368.

snowballs. As long as the reproducing churches keep a unified vision, the movement can build steam and grow steadily, even exponentially.<sup>18</sup>

As early as 1998, Eric Swanson helped start a GCM in Boulder, Colorado with the belief that, “Cities are far larger than churches, we are writing about the kingdom and how the whole church can bring the whole gospel – in word and deed – to the whole city.”<sup>19</sup> Under the leadership of Kevin Palau and the Luis Palau Association, an initiative in Portland, Oregon was formed, called City Serve, which is a movement that “Encourages, equips, and empowers the Body of Christ to love and serve the city through united, long-term efforts focused on the greatest needs.”<sup>20</sup> This subsequently spawned other City Serve initiatives and the hosting by the Palau Association of a Gospel Movement website and network, which has identified and serves new GCMs throughout the U.S.<sup>21</sup>

More recently, grassroots local pastors and missional leaders have initiated new GCMs that have gained sizable followings. In Denver, Colorado, Dave Runyon serves as the Director of City Unite, a movement which “Helps church leaders work together to partner with business and government leaders to address the major issues facing their

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<sup>18</sup> Timothy Keller, Tim Chester, Daniel Montgomery, Mike Cosper, and Alan Hirsch, *Serving a Movement: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 194.

<sup>19</sup> Eric Swanson and Sam Williams, *To Transform a City: Whole Church, Whole Gospel, Whole City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 21.

<sup>20</sup> City Serve Portland, “What is CityServe Portland?” <https://cityservepdx.org>, accessed January 14, 2019.

<sup>21</sup> City Gospel Movements, “Celebrating Collaborative Gospel Work,” <https://citygospelmovements.org>, accessed March 29, 2019.

cities.”<sup>22</sup> Integral to the vision of City Unite is the conviction that “Cross sector collaboration is the key to changing our communities for the better.”<sup>23</sup> In Phoenix, Arizona, Pastor Tyler Johnson initiated the Surge Network, whose purpose is “To equip, send and bless churches to serve their community.”<sup>24</sup> The Christ Together movement in Austin, Texas includes churches coming together “To inspire, connect, challenge and support each other, as well as the churches of Greater Austin.”<sup>25</sup> Born out of years of prayer, the lead pastors in this inter-denominational network share a common vision, which is “Communicating and demonstrating the good news of Jesus Christ with every man, woman and child.”<sup>26</sup> In South Florida, Church United is “A partnership of local churches across denominations joining together to transform our region.”<sup>27</sup>

These specific GCMs and many others like them across the United States, share an objective level of commonality. The Gospel Movement website describes a gospel movement as: “A united, sustainable effort by churches and cultural leaders to transform

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<sup>22</sup> City Unite, “What We Do,” 2018, <https://cityunite.org/index.php/our-mission/>, accessed March 23, 2017.

<sup>23</sup> City Unite, “What We Do,” <https://cityunite.org/index.php/our-mission/>, accessed March 23, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Surge Network, “About,” 2015, <https://surgenetwork.com/about/>, accessed March 23, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Christ Together Greater Austin, “Leadership,” 2018, <https://christtogethergreateraustin.com/about/leadership/>, accessed March 23, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Christ Together Greater Austin, “Leadership,” <https://christtogethergreateraustin.com/about/leadership/>, accessed March 23, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Church United, “Who we Are,” <https://churchunitedfl.com>, accessed March 23, 2017.

their city by meeting critical needs and sharing the love and message of Jesus Christ.”<sup>28</sup>

At least four key elements of GCMs are implicit in this definition and corroborated by relevant literature on GCMs:

1. Local orientation: A near-context focus upon the particular city and its unique features, in which a GCM might reside.
2. Church unity: At least three critical factors of unity are resonant in contemporary GCMs, including (1) relationship, (2) prayer, and (3) missional activity. These priorities inherently lead to greater missional collaboration.
3. Missional collaboration: Cooperative activity (i.e., “mission”) that is influenced by the uniqueness of the city, and “collaboration” that is marked by genuine unity over against a shallow version of uniformity. As such, missional collaboration includes the categories of common witness, common good, common voice, and common outcomes.
4. Empowerment of laity: GCMs are recovering and championing vision for the idea of vocation, which celebrates virtually all forms of work as existing for God’s glory and the public’s good.

### **Historical Antecedents of Gospel City Movements**

A deeper understanding of contemporary GCMs can be discerned by tracing their historical antecedents and precursors from the New Testament and historical witness.

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<sup>28</sup> City Gospel Movements, “What is a Gospel Movement?” <https://citygospelmovements.org/trending-questions/#WhatisCGM>, accessed March 23, 2017.

Church history has shaped the thinking and aspirations resonant in present day GCM formations in their efforts to fulfill God's mission in their respective cities. As a living system, the church has always existed in constantly changing historical forms.<sup>29</sup> From the New Testament records, we can observe a "multiplicity of different types of churches" that arose with unique strengths and weaknesses, diverse theological challenges, and distinctive cultural particularities and personalities.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, although the early Church developed cultural groupings, worship styles, and leadership affinities, on the whole they still maintained a central ethos of "one Church in the City with multiple congregations."<sup>31</sup>

Extending forward from the New Testament Scriptures, throughout church history we see that relatedness between church communities has always been integral to the form in which the church expresses itself. Since its earliest beginnings, the Church has been forming, splintering, and reforming. There have always been movements of church renewal and revitalization throughout history. Through councils, revivals, and reformations, the Church has constantly sought both theologically and in praxis to understand and operate in light of who the church is and how it relates to itself and to an ever-changing world. Throughout its history the church has also developed acclimated responses that have given rise to new and unique ecclesial forms relevant to the particular sociocultural milieu in which the church has existed within society. More recently, the

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<sup>29</sup> Hans Kung, *The Church* (New York: Image Books, 1968), 23.

<sup>30</sup> Kung, *The Church*, 355.

<sup>31</sup> Tom White, *City Wide Prayer Movements: One Church, Many Congregations* (Sisters, OR: Servant Publications, 2001), 52.

sociological vectors of urbanization, globalization, and pluralism have especially shaped the emerging trends of present-day GCMs. These vectors, and the American Church's sometimes conflictive and combative responses to them over the last several centuries, has created a seemingly rich environment for the propagation and growth of GCM's at this particular moment in history.

### **Biblical and Theological Foundations of Gospel City Movements**

The Bible has much to say about the city, beginning with its formation in Genesis unto its final destiny in Revelation. This biblical metanarrative underpins and informs GCMs strategic missional praxis. Consequently, articulating a theological vision of the city and its relationship to the people of God, and more specifically to the Church, is foundational for how GCMs envision their urban missiology.

Accordingly, GCM leaders have emphasized the need for strong theological consensus as a primary basis for effectiveness and unity. Ray Bakke contends that the most formidable challenge to effective urban ministry is primarily theological, since "most Christians still read the Bible through rural lenses."<sup>32</sup> Robert Linthicum also points out that:

We enter the city equipped with an urban sociology and urban tools for ministry, but we carry with us the baggage of a theology designed in rural Europe. Even the very way we formulate theological questions and the frameworks we use to construct our theological thought have been forged from our rural past. What we are in need of is a theology as urban as our sociology and missiology.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Bakke, *A Theology As Big As The City*, 77.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Linthicum, *City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 155.



In an increasingly urban world, the Church needs to connect with the deep eschatological significance that the entire Bible places on the nature and role of the city in God's unfolding plan. Accentuating the eschatological significance of the city, Eric Swanson also forcefully expresses that "in many ways that we may not fully understand or grasp, cities are irrevocably tied to the eternal plans of God."<sup>34</sup>

The Bible reveals a rich theological portrait of the city; including its nature, role, and characteristics; along with God's disposition, plan, and missionary calling toward it. A biblical survey across the terrain of Scripture reveals at least five significant impulses included in a theology of the city: (1) the creation of the first city, (2) God's response to the city, (3) Jesus and the city, (4) the Church and the city, and (5) the final chapter of the city. Each of these theological themes are explored through a biblical survey in Chapter Two, to provide a theology of the city which uniquely informs the present research study.

### **Collective Impact and Gospel City Movements**

In addition to the biblical and theological foregrounding used to anchor and organize this research project, this study also incorporates relevant insights from the social science domain of collective impact (CI). Collective impact was first introduced in 2011, by John Kania, Managing Director at Foundation Strategy Group (FSG): *Reimagining Social Change*, and Mark Kramer, Kennedy School at Harvard.<sup>35</sup> As a

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<sup>34</sup> Swanson, *To Transform a City*, 35.

<sup>35</sup> John Kania and Mark Kramer, "Collective Impact," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 9, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 36-41.

distinct organizational model, the evolution of CI has precipitated out of a need for enhanced constructs and methodologies to more effectively address diverse social problems that are inherently large and complex. Collective Impact stands in contrast to historically conventional approaches that can be referred to as “isolated impact.” The basic strategy of isolated impact is to fund and leverage single organizations that by themselves attempt to influence social problems. In contrast, CI is defined as the “Long-term commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem, using a structured form of collaboration.”<sup>36</sup> Collective impact has contributed to sustained improvements and is rapidly gaining use around the world to address large-scale adaptive social problems.<sup>37</sup> Collective impact is a versatile systematic framework that strategically engages diverse community sectors to impact long-term outcomes.<sup>38</sup> As an organizational and operation framework, this model exemplifies fruitful potential for GCMs to adapt and use.

Collective impact is distinct from different kinds of traditional collaboration, representing a more disciplined, systematic, and higher performing approach to achieving large-scale social impact. As an organizational system, CI incorporates five core

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<sup>36</sup> Kania and Kramer, “Collective Impact,” 36.

<sup>37</sup> Norman Walzer, Liz Weaver, and Catherine McGuire, “Collective Impact Approaches and Community Development Issues,” *Community Development* 47, no. 2 (2016): 156-166.

<sup>38</sup> Walzer, Weaver, and McGuire, “Collective Impact Approaches and Community Development Issues,” 157.

conditions, that when taken together, encourage deeper organizational alignment that can lead to more powerful outcomes.<sup>39</sup> These five conditions include:

1. Common agenda: All participants have a shared vision for social change that includes a common understanding of the problem and an agreed upon approach and activities for solving the problem.<sup>40</sup>
2. Shared measurement system: Having agreed upon ways that results will be measured and reported.<sup>41</sup>
3. Mutually reinforcing activities: Coordinating a set of differentiated activities through a conjoined plan of action.<sup>42</sup>
4. Continuous communication: Consistent and open communication over time among key participants within and across contributing organizations.<sup>43</sup>
5. Backbone organization: ongoing support by an independent staff dedicated to serving and managing the initiative.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Kania and Kramer, “Collective Impact,” 39.

<sup>40</sup> Fay Hanleybrown, John Kania, and Mark Kramer, “Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (January 26, 2012), 8-9.

<sup>41</sup> Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer, “Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work,” 10-12.

<sup>42</sup> Kania and Kramer, “Collective Impact,” 40.

<sup>43</sup> Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer, “Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work,” 15-16.

<sup>44</sup> Kania and Kramer, “Collective Impact,” 40.

## **Purpose of the Research Project**

Though many GCMs are rising across the country, they seem to exist more organically and distinctively city by city rather than through models of shared practice. The Luis Palau Association is working to collect data on these GCMs and currently has 264 movements listed in their database. They are also working to share information across movements. However, despite the considerable interest and attention given to GCMs, little if any formal research exists on the common features that define these movements and distinguish them from similar current or historical church expressions. Clarifying the core identity of large U.S. GCMs, using the four key elements identified above as a starting point, might serve as a valuable foundation for future research and practice around GCMs. Additionally, GCMs might benefit from considering the potential applicability of the CI model to help inform and shape them. The conceptual overlap between the core conditions of CI and the hypothesized key features of GCMs suggest potential integrative elements for synergy. These considerations were taken up by this research project, which sought to clarify the common identity and unique expressions of current largescale GCMs in the U.S., and to explore the perceived applicability and usefulness of the CI model to help inform their operations.

These research goals for this project were structured around the following major and minor research questions:

1. Primary research question: What are the shared features as well as the unique expressions of GCMs in the U.S. with regard to a unifying agenda and goals as well as processes and measures?

2. Secondary research question: What is the perceived applicability and usefulness of the CI model to current largescale city movements?

### **Design of the Research Project**

This research project was exploratory in nature. Accordingly, this study used a phenomenological qualitative research design as the most fitting method to accomplish its objectives. The goal of this approach was to capture the insider perspectives of GCM executive leaders' experiences, thoughts, and beliefs with respect to the research questions. The qualitative research methods used in this study are grounded in individual in-depth interviews, which are more specifically delineated in Chapter Four.

A purposeful sample selection procedure was used to specifically focus on seven contemporary large-scale GCMs in the U.S. Purposive sampling was an appropriate selection method for this research project, because current executive practitioners of GCMs were anticipated to be rich insider informants to this study.<sup>45</sup> The particular GCMs explored in this study were selected from 246 U.S. GCMs in the Palau "City Serve" database. From this list, seven GCMs were chosen and validated by expert confirmation from a GCM national leadership team.

The following seven GCMs were selected for this study:

- (1) Charlotte (For Charlotte)
- (2) Denver (City Unite)

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<sup>45</sup> John Creswell suggests that, for purposeful sampling, researchers should select participants based on their ability to contribute to an evolving theory. See: John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 141.

- (3) New York City (New York City Serve)
- (4) Phoenix (Surge Network)
- (5) Portland (City Serve)
- (6) San Francisco Bay Area (Transform the Bay)
- (7) South Florida (Church United)

For each of the GCMs considered, background organizational research was conducted, which was then followed by individual in-depth interviews with a representative executive leader. The interviews were implemented through a OneHope research team, and were semi-structured around an interview script (Appendix C). Each of the completed interviews were transcribed, and inductive analysis was performed on the interview transcriptions to identify emergent themes in light of the research questions.

### **Summary and Overview of the Research Project**

The dramatic effects of 21<sup>st</sup> century macro realities, including urbanization, globalization, and pluralism have precipitated the need for GCMs. Much rich dialogue has resulted in a renewed understanding that the Church faces challenges and opportunities to engage an increasingly urbanized, globalized, pluralistic populace that is rising in today's cities. The missional and theological challenges that urban local churches face has resulted in them banding together in hopes of establishing a common witness that would produce more effective and unified outcomes.

Although these GCMs appear to have similar characteristics there has been inadequate research to identify the key foundational principals that embody their core identity and give rise to their unique expressions and models of shared practice. This

research project seeks to generate contributive insight for GCMs by exploring in more detail their commonly shared features, unique expressions, and organizational methodologies. The purpose of this study was thus to explore the common identity and unique expressions of current largescale GCMs in the U.S., along with the perceived applicability and usefulness of the CI model to potentially enrich their practice.

In the following Chapter Two, the biblical and theological foundations for this study are established by a biblical survey that outlines a theology of the city. In order to further ground and structure the direction of this research project, Chapter Three reviews the relevant literature concerning the two domains of GCMs and CI. Chapter Four explains the research project's design and procedures that were utilized in the study. This chapter explains the research principles and logistics that guided the process of sample selection, data collection, and inductive analysis. The ensuing research results are included in Chapter Five, as the conclusions and outcomes of this study. This chapter also offers a reflection on the most helpful discoveries, implications, and considerations for GCMs that emerged future out of this research project. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are also presented.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research study was to explore the common identity and unique expressions of current largescale gospel city movements (GCMs) in the U.S., along with the perceived applicability and usefulness of the collective impact (CI) model to current GCMs in the U.S. To better understand this research project, it needs to be viewed through the lens of Scripture. By considering the Scriptural foundations for this project, a theological framework can be outlined that undergirds the design and enlightens the direction of the present exploratory study. Therefore, this chapter aims at constructing a theology of the city that will ground and shape this research project.

From the beginning of its formation in Genesis, unto its final destiny in Revelation, the Bible repeatedly and purposefully speaks about the city. A biblical survey across the terrain of Scripture reveals at least five significant movements progressively revealed in a theology of the city: (1) the creation of the first city, (2) God's response to the city, (3) Jesus and the city, (4) the Church and the city, and (5) the final chapter of the city. This chapter explores each of these theological impulses through a



biblical survey, in order to provide a theology of the city which uniquely informs the present research study at hand.

### **A Biblical Survey Toward a Theology of the City**

Articulating a theology of the city is a necessary precursor to better understanding current largescale GCMs' common identity and operational frameworks. The following sections therefore explore the nature, role, and characteristics of the city; along with God's disposition, plan, and missionary calling toward the city which are progressively unfolded through the metanarrative of the Bible. This survey begins, then, with the first city erected in Scripture which arises out of the narrative of Cain and Abel.

### **The Creation of the First City**

The first city created in the Scripture came as an expression of Cain's rebellion against God. The original creation of God placed humanity in the Garden of Eden. Although quite rapidly in the biblical narrative, because of their sin, Adam and Eve were driven out of their perfect habitat in Eden to a place of toil. The curse brought about by sin was also accompanied with God's promise of redemption, the *protoevangelium* (Gen 3:15).<sup>1</sup> Promptly in the Genesis narrative, sin deviously festered in the original family, and graphically protruded with the murder of Abel by his brother, Cain. God's subsequent judgement upon Cain called for him to become a "fugitive" and a "wanderer" in the world (Gen 4:12). In response, Cain unjustifiably complained that, "My

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture citations are taken from the English Standard Version, 2007, unless otherwise noted.

punishment is more than I can bear,” (Gen 4:13) to which God responded with His promise of protection. However, Cain rejected God’s protection over his life and instead responded with an alternative construct for self-preservation in the founding of what would become the creation of the first city: “Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord... and he built a city” (Gen 4:16-17). From the earliest account then, of the first city mentioned in the Scriptures, we see that “the founding of the city comes as a result of Cain’s search for security in the world and of God’s granting his request.”<sup>2</sup> This motivational ethos at play in the creation of the first city is further explained by Jacques Ellul:

Cain has built a city. For God’s Eden he substituted his own, for the goal given to his life by God, he substitutes a goal chosen by himself – just as he substituted his own security for God’s. Such is the act by which Cain takes his destiny on his own shoulders, refusing the hand of God in his life. And If someone thinks I am drawing unwarranted conclusions let him remember that this city is called Enoch. The city is Enoch. “Enoch” means “initiation” or “dedication.”<sup>3</sup>

Unlike the original Eden that was created in God’s nature, Cain sought to manufacture his own creation in the propagation of the first human city. Living with complete insecurity, because of his rejection of God and disbelief in God’s protection, Cain fortified his own physical walls to protect himself in this first humanly constructed city. Henry Spence also explains the seeds of rebellion that began to manifest in Cain’s creation of the first city:

It is possible also that his attempt to found a city may have been dictated by a desire to bid defiance to the curse which doomed him to a wandering life; to

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Keller, *Loving the City: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 118.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 1970, Reprint (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 4.

create for his family and himself a new point of interest outside the holy circle of Eden, and to find an outlet for those energies and powers of which, as an early progenitor of the race, he must have been conscious, and in the restless activity of which oblivion for his misery could alone be found.<sup>4</sup>

According to the Genesis story, Cain journeyed east of Eden, the place of the rising sun (Gen 4:16). In the prospect of building the first city, there were constant new beginnings, but never the satisfaction of completion, nor seasons, nor rest. It would seem that Cain built this first city not only for security, and in defiance of God, but also for identity as a place of his own, calling it after the name of his son – Enoch (Gen 4:17). The Hebrew meaning of the name *chanskh* in the passage means “initiated.”<sup>5</sup> Cain sought to construct an alternative version of the perfection of Eden, and would not stop building in the futile attempt to attain it. In Cain’s rejection of God he also turned away from God’s creation in Eden. From the origins of the first human city then, the early foundations are laid for impulses that are against God as Creator and His designed purposes for man’s goodwill. In rejection of God, the original first human city also sought to attain protection and identity apart from Him.

The Genesis narrative milieu in which the creation of the first city was erected indicates broadly that the new construct of the city will always seek to overtake the country, because the manipulative craftiness of Cain will always seek to rule over the murdered concept of Abel. Humanity may seek refuge in the country but it cannot hide from the power of the city. As Ellul summarizes, “We must admit that the city is not just

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Donald Maurice Spence-Jones, *The Pulpit Commentary* (Harrington, DE: Delmavara Publications, 2013), 88.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander C. Grant, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, “Apocalyptic Literature,” (Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), sec. II.

a collection of houses with ramparts, but also a spiritual power. I am not saying it is a being. But like an angel, it is a power, and what seems prodigious is that its power is on a spiritual plane. The city has, then, a spiritual influence. It is capable of directing and changing a man's spiritual life."<sup>6</sup> The creation of the first city of Cain, represents then a kind of collective spiritual force that embodied an attempt to defy God and acquire self-protection and identity apart from Him.

### *Nimrod the City Builder*

The next critical pivot in the biblical story with respect to the city comes through the character of Nimrod in Genesis 10. While the Scripture omits many details about him, it does put forth an essential indicator that he was a son of Ham (Gen 10:6-8). This detail is important for our study, because Ham was "the impure son, the one who disobeyed one of God's fundamental laws, and the one upon whom a curse was laid. Once again the city is to follow upon a curse as the act by which man tries to escape the curse."<sup>7</sup> As a descendent of Ham, living under the curse of his ancestors and disgraced because of their rebellion, Nimrod is pictured as becoming the prototypical powerful and mighty man (Gen 10:9).

Keil and Delitzsch explain that "The name itself, Nimrod from מֶרֶד, 'we will revolt,' points to some violent resistance to God."<sup>8</sup> Nimrod, we are told was a "mighty

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<sup>6</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 10.

<sup>8</sup> C. F. Keil and Delitzsch, F., "Genesis 10," in Bible Hub, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/kad/genesis/10.htm>, accessed November 19, 2018.

hunter before the Lord” (Gen 10:9). In mightiness, Nimrod was not in submission to the Lord, but was actually standing in defiance of the Lord. The picture is one of Nimrod standing with his fist raised to the face of God, against the curse that God had placed upon his family. Therefore, “By those useful services he earned a title to public gratitude; and, having established a permanent ascendancy over the people, he founded the first kingdom in the world.”<sup>9</sup> The biblical narrative goes on to list a whole range of cities that Nimrod planned and built, including Nineveh, Calah, Resen, and others (Gen 10:10-12).

Given the rebellious character of Nimrod against God, it is indicated that at the root of every one of his cities was a residing spiritual dynamic, destiny and power. Each of these cities has a new, unique character, born from its founding, and from its roots exudes a spiritual dimension of rebellion and defiance of God. Nimrod the builder, thus perpetuated the early cities of Genesis as expressions of rebellion against God. The center of Nimrod’s kingdom was Babel, “the gate of the gods,” which became the “the place of confusion.”<sup>10</sup>

### *Babel and the Spirit of the City*

While the different cities grew in the early chapters of the Genesis story, the city of Babel quickly emerged into prominence as the ancient megacity of all cities. Babel

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, “Genesis 10:9,” in Bible Hub, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/genesis/10-9.htm>, accessed November 19, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 10.

was thus pictured as a leading magnet of all the cities of the day. Furthermore, its emphasis was on culminating independence and extending separation from God. As Tim Keller explains, “The spirit of the line of Cain reaches its climax in this effort to build the city of Babel. The new city and tower are designed to help residents gain an identity separate from the service of God.”<sup>11</sup> Babel was built with an intense desire for identity apart from God, to make a name for itself that was separate from God (Gen 11:4).

Throughout history, people have flocked into the city to try to make a name for themselves. Even to this day, students flock to the university, artists gather to Greenwich Village, movie producers cluster in Hollywood, and politicians congregate in Washington D.C. People go to the center of the spirit of the city to make their name. Reflecting on this biblical-cultural phenomenon, Ellul observes that: “They want to name themselves. In fact they want to make a name for themselves. For it is not enough to give oneself a name, the name must be earned. It must mean something. To make a name for oneself has nothing to do with the modern expression referring to a reputation; it means becoming independent, and that is what their attempt at building meant.”<sup>12</sup> The impetus to make a name for oneself, and to do this in the city, can thus be traced back to the ancient city of Babel. This is the spirit of the city.

In Babel, the rampant spirit of pride became the driving force and consuming feature of the city. The people wanted to “build themselves a city,” to “make a name for themselves,” and to stand in resistance to the command and purposes of God (Gen 10:4).

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<sup>11</sup> Keller, *Loving the City*, 120.

<sup>12</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 16.

Upon seeing this self-destructive plan underway, God intervened for the protection of His own creation and plan of redemption. Keil and Delitzsch explain how God “scattered the men abroad, this act of divine judgment cannot be understood in any other way, than that God deprived them of the ability to comprehend one another, and thus effected their dispersion.”<sup>13</sup> The emphasis of God’s intervention was therefore not so much in Him giving them different languages, but more so on the inability for them to understand each other. Even though they were living in close proximity to one another, they became so different from one another because they did not understand the meaning of what they were saying. A humanity capable of communicating with each other has the weapon of its own death; the ability to create its own unique truths and meanings for life independent of God. Therefore God confused their language in order to sustain His creation.

In tracing a biblical theology of city, the ancient story of Babel shows us how an urbanized, globalized, and increasingly technologically-connected world grew ever closer to a universally godless way of living. These elements continue to be at work in the spirit of Babylon which is to come later in the story of Scripture. In all of man’s efforts, it is declared here in Genesis, and again at the end of God’s story in Revelation, that their work will never be completed because God will not allow it to be completed. Babel will eventually become Babylon, the prototypical symbol of humanity’s wholesale rejection of God, which will one day be ultimately destroyed by God.

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<sup>13</sup> C. F. Keil and Delitzsch, F., “Genesis 11:5,” in Bible Hub, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/genesis/11-5.htm>, accessed November 19, 2018.

Babel was the early culmination then, of the city project as a prideful expression of resisting God's commands and purposes by trying to gain identity and independence apart from Him. But throughout Scripture, God would continue to respond to the city and its humanity with His redemptive disposition, plan, and missionary calling.

### **God's Response to the City**

The second important theme revealed in a theology of the city is God's response to the city. The motif of the city, and of man's creation of it, is further unfolded in the narrative of the city of Sodom (Gen 18-19). Mentioned more than 50 times in the Bible, the city of Sodom became a kind of byword for sexual sin and violence. However within the story of Sodom we also see the continuation of God's merciful response to the city. The Lord told Abraham "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know" (Gen 18:20-21). In response, Abraham pleaded for God's mercy for the city in a back and forth exchange with God, in which the Lord went on to declare that "For the sake of ten (righteous people) I will not destroy it" (Gen 18:32). From the story of Sodom, we see this abiding principle concerning God's response to the city. Namely, that God is willing to relent from wrath and save cities where his people are present.

Although sexual sin and violence are clear indicators for the city of Sodom's demise, Ezekiel lists another primary reason: They "had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it" (Ezek 16:49-50). Hedonism,



pride, and selfishness were fueled and seemed to boil over in Sodom, indicating a propensity and kind of seduction that cities can compound in their citizens. Albeit, God's mercy is portrayed not only as available but as longingly interested in the seeking out of the righteous. Such is evidenced in the angels that came looking for His people even if there were only the possibility of ten who were righteous. This merciful disposition of God's response to the city is echoed later again by the prophets when God spoke through Jeremiah to "Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her" (Jer 5:1).

The city of Sodom thus indicates that God's people are seen as participants in God's mercy through their prayer and presence. As Keller points out, "cities in the service of self-aggrandizement may work to unravel and destroy the world God made and to contest His Lordship over it. But as we will see, the city form, in service to God, actually fulfills the will of God for human life."<sup>14</sup> God's response to the city involves using His people to bring about the opportunity for mercy and forgiveness. Thus Ellul also reflects that "the solidarity of the city is also made manifest in God's forgiveness. The entire city is spared when there is one pocket of righteousness."<sup>15</sup> The city of Sodom thus demonstrates God's response to the city, as one filled with a mercy that is expressed by way of Him using His people and their presence to bear influence within the city, so that others might be brought to Himself.

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<sup>14</sup> Keller, *Loving the City*, 121.

<sup>15</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 64.

### *Nineveh and Jonah*

The story of Jonah and Nineveh further demonstrates God's response to the city by highlighting His redemptive disposition and important regard for the city. In Nineveh we also see a foreshadowing of God's missionary call to the city, as Jonah, the reluctant missionary-evangelist, is called to bring God's message to the city. The call of God came to Jonah to "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me" (Jonah 1:2). Several times in the story of Jonah, the city of Nineveh is described as a "great city" (Jonah 1:2; 3:2, 3; 4:11). These repeated adjectives indicate a special importance to Nineveh's size and influence. Nineveh was a city of strategic missionary import, because more of God's creation was concentrated here in one place, and the city itself possessed privileged influence at this particular moment of history. The disposition and response of God to the city is encapsulated at the end of the book of Jonah, when God asks rhetorically, "And should not I pity Nineveh? That great city? In which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left and also much cattle" (Jonah 4:11).

Not only does the story of Jonah and the city of Nineveh display God's merciful response and call to the city, but it also indicates the significant place of the city within the missionary purposes of God. Based upon this story, Keller argues that God "makes a case for the importance of the city from the sheer number of the human beings in residence," adding that "this is a critical reason that the city is so important today... cities, quite literally, have more of the image of God per square inch than any other place on earth."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Keller, *Loving the City*, 124.

In reflecting upon the story of Jonah and Nineveh to inform a theology of the city and missional praxis for today, at least two overarching principles can be discerned. First, the city is a highlighted place of importance for the missionary purposes of God. The number of people in the city, the economic power and wealth, and the influence of culture are all at play in this story. These features of the city being birthed out of Nineveh were such that if God's people and message didn't have an impact in Nineveh then the missionary purposes of God would suffer. Second, God sent his messenger Jonah, an Israelite prophet into this pagan city as an example of His redemptive disposition toward all of humanity. God's response to Nineveh is not an isolated story of His love to one city, but rather is a declaration consistent with His purpose and strategy towards all cities.

From the creation of Cain's first city, we see the growth of cities that reject God. Nevertheless God consistently responds to the city with His redemptive plan and missionary calling. God calls His people to join His mission of mercy and grace towards the cities of the world. Thus the story of Jonah bears continual missional praxis for us today. Jonah's task is our task, a permanent and pervading missionary calling to His people until God's full and final kingdom has come, along with His promised and glorious new city. Therefore, "we must unceasingly proclaim God's curse and judgment on the city; but we must also pray to God that it will not happen, that he have pity (Should not I pity 120,000 men?), that he grant life to the city, that he make of it something to his glory. We must do this even at the cost of looking ridiculous and being embarrassed."<sup>17</sup> The story of Jonah and Nineveh thus informs a theology of the city by

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<sup>17</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 77.

indicating God's response to the city that is accentuated in His redemptive disposition toward, important regard for, and missionary calling to – the city.

### *The City of God and the City of Man*

In tracing the metanarrative of Scripture with an eye toward compiling a theology of the city, the next thematic movement comes by way of a comparative contrast between the city of God and the city of man. The Old Testament books of Isaiah, Psalms, and Ezekiel particularly highlight an emergence of the city of God as a counter-cultural and sociological vision of how God's people can and should live in a contrasting manner to the sinful human inclinations that characterize the city of man. The book of Isaiah refers to the city of God in a positive way more than 60 times. For example, God proclaims that:

In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: "We have a strong city; he sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks. Open the gates, that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in. You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock" (Isa 26:1-4).

The prophet Isaiah exhibits an emerging theme that contrasts a tale of two cities, a proud city built by man, and an enduringly strong city which is built by God. While the physical city of Jerusalem would come to represent the city of God in the Old Testament, the idea of God's city more centrally had to do with the gathering of God's people who enjoy His presence dwelling in their midst. So then, "the strong city in which he rejoices is other than the material Jerusalem, though it may have suggested the metaphor of my text... the central thought that was moving in the prophet's mind is that of the

indestructible vitality of the true Israel, and the order which it represented, of which Jerusalem on its rock was but to him a symbol.”<sup>18</sup>

The city of God theme also carries with it a prophetic aspiration of an ultimate culmination that will come one day at the earth’s end and an ushering in of a new heaven and earth when the final city of God descends. As the Apostle John will later describe in Revelation: “I saw the holy city. The new Jerusalem” (Rev 21:12). This is the strong city of God, not the lofty city of man, “coming down out of heaven, from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband” (Rev. 21:12). This future city of God will be the ultimate Isaianic fulfillment of the perpetual presence and peace of God that will permeate His holy city. The strong city of God provides peace for all of its inhabitants, in contrast to the city of man, which is a lofty, prideful and insecure place.

Jerusalem is the archetypical city that God established in the Old Testament. Keller believes that “the biggest change in the city’s role within redemptive history comes with the establishment of Jerusalem” and that it was “appointed to be an urban culture that was a witness to the nations and a symbol of the future city of God.”<sup>19</sup> This portrayal of God’s city, prophetically referred to as Zion, constitutes the rest, the blessing, and the shalom of human life in its most exalted state. The future Zion is presented as eternal life, ultimately as a connected social life in an eternal city. This vision points out the contrast between the beginning and the final condition of all people. The career of man began in a garden, the fitting home of a race that began as few in

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<sup>18</sup> Matthew Henry, “Isaiah 26:1,” in Bible Hub, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/isaiah/26-1.htm>, accessed November 19, 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Keller, *Loving the City*, 122.

number. The drama of humanity's rejecting of the Lord through the city of man, was met with God's relentless pursuit of people through the foreshadowed city of God – which will one day decisively culminate in the fulfilled city of God where the multitudes of His people will finally be gathered.

This juxtaposition between the city of man and the city of God is also repeated in the book of Psalms and Ezekiel. In Psalm 48, the concept of the city of God is eloquently described by the sons of Korah: "Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain. Beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth, like the heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King. God is in her citadels, he has shown himself to be her fortress" (Ps 48:1-3). Matthew Henry portrays Zion in three dispensations: the past Jerusalem, the present manifestation of His people on earth, and the future the fulfillment of our eternal abode. He explains that "Zion is where hearts love and trust and follow Christ. The 'city of the great King' is a permanent reality in a partial form upon earth – and that partial form is itself a prophecy of the perfection of the heavens."<sup>20</sup> What is indicated thus includes both the present sovereign ability of God to rule His people, no matter what the political, economic or social condition is in the city of man in which they may live; as well as a prophetic perfection of the city yet to come. As opposed to Babel, the prototypical city of man, the city of God is portrayed by the hope of Israel's Jerusalem and Kingdom's Zion, "...the joy of the whole earth" (Ps 48:2).

The book of Ezekiel extols the promise of the city of God as a hope that is not exclusively held out to Israel, but rather to all of humanity. In Ezekiel 16, Jerusalem is

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<sup>20</sup> Henry, "Isaiah 26:1."

presented as mixed-race city. The vision presented here indicates the hope of all nations, the beautiful city of God that lives under God's power and provision. God's promise was that:

Yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant. Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and I give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I atone for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord GOD" (Ezek 16:60-63).

The subsequent tragedy in Israel's history unfolds Jerusalem's failure to live out God's vision and their inevitable destruction as they themselves surrender the city of God to the haughty, proud and sinful grasp of man's city. However, the prophetic promise at the end of the Ezekiel 16 establishes the coming of "an everlasting covenant" for the citizens of Jerusalem and its spiritual descendants. In contrasting the city of God and the city of man, we see how "throughout her history, Jerusalem served as a witness, a witness city because she was there to show men what God's action was in regard to the city."<sup>21</sup> In summary, the city of God is seen as (1) the Old Testament city of Jerusalem, (2) the sovereign reign and presence of God dwelling in the midst of His people, and (3) the future aspiration of God's full and final city to come. The city of God is one that pervades with His peace, protection, provision, and presence. This is set in stark contrast to the city of man – one marked out by pride, selfishness, insecurity, and sin.

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<sup>21</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 104.

## *Babylon and the Captivity*

God's response to the city is further exemplified in the captivity period when Israel is taken away to Babylon. The Scriptural record of the Babylonian captivity, and God's later judgment upon Babylon was more than a historical event, but rather represents a pervading sign for all people of all time:

A sign is an event by which spiritual and even eschatological realities become no longer abstract, but actual. They are presented figuratively, but concretely and effectively; that is, they have an effect. Thus God's judgment on Babylon and the history of his relationship with her are for all time the mirror of his relationship with all cities, because God took Babylon as a sign of all the cities. Whatever the sociological differences between cities, Babylon is eternally a figure of the other, since God made the decision.<sup>22</sup>

As a continuing framework that emerges out of this context, Jeremiah 29 becomes an instruction manual for how God's people of all time are called to respond to the context of whatever city in which they live:

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper. Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them, declares the Lord. This is what the Lord says: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile (Jer 29:4-14).

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<sup>22</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 59.



James Davidson Hunter, in the development of his theology of faithful presence, used this passage to point out that exile didn't mean abandonment but rather indicated the place and context in which God was at work. He explains that:

Exile did not mean that God had abandoned Israel. Rather, exile was the place where God was at work. God's purposes with Israel, in other words, were served by the Babylonian invasion. God, as the text repeats, "sent" them into exile. Exile would clearly last long beyond the present generation. Clearly it would have been justifiable for the Jews to be hostile to their captors. It also would have been natural enough for them to withdraw from engaging the world around them. By the same token, it would have been easy for them to simply assimilate with the culture that surrounded them. Any of these three options made sense in human terms. But God was calling them to something different—not to be defensive against, isolated from, or absorbed into the dominant culture, but to be faithfully present within it.<sup>23</sup>

The prophet Jeremiah makes several points that we see actually lived out in the story of Daniel and his young friends. The essence of Jeremiah's instruction to the people was to cease longing for the nostalgia of the past. Since the past was over, God's people were not to plan rebellion. The State was not the enemy. Nebuchadnezzar was not the enemy. Rather, God was actually using them as His sovereign instruments in order to accomplish His purposes. This perspective informs a theology of the city. The city, which is often a place of evil, is at the same time being used by God as an instrument of mission to draw the nations to himself. As with the story of Daniel, the caution for God's people who live in the city is to not be absorbed into Babylon, which is temporary; but rather to engage in it without being assimilated by it. The missional challenge for the city brought out by Daniel is to practice faithful engagement without

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<sup>23</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, & Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 277.

assimilation. Just as Daniel so winsomely exhibited, when he understood the ways of the Babylonians even better than the Babylonians did themselves, and also knew when not to eat the king's meat (Dan 1:8-20). As Frank Boyd points out,

Daniel met the supreme demand upon his personal decision which was occasioned by the new and testing surroundings and temptations of the imperial court, the capital not only of Gentile power but also of heathen idolatry. Daniel had to decide, at the risk alike of forfeiting the most dazzling earthly prospects and of provoking the murderous wrath of the irresponsible young autocrat, that he would not be of Babylon although in it, that he would be as out and out for God in Babylon as in Jerusalem, that, while politically under the feet of Babylon, yet morally and spiritually he would put Babylon under his feet.<sup>24</sup>

These implications are also echoed by Ellul, who explains that “we are now at the center of the adventure, both rejected and called. Both possessed and freed. We are subjects of the city and involved in its condemnation, and yet we are the possible artisans of her adoption by God.”<sup>25</sup> Keller also adds that “while living in Babylon, they are not to simply increase their tribe in a ghetto within the city; they are to use their resources to benefit the common good,” and that God “insures that His people serving the good of this pagan city is part of the very plan.”<sup>26</sup>

The lesson of captivity in Babylon is instructional for the people of God today, informing how we relate with the places and cities in which we live. As Keller observes: “During the exile, Israel no longer existed in the form of a nation-state with a government and laws. Instead, it existed as counter-cultural fellowship contained within other nation-

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<sup>24</sup> Frank M. Boyd, *Old Testament Studies* (Springfield, MO: Berean School of the Bible, 1967), 141.

<sup>25</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 71.

<sup>26</sup> Keller, *Loving the City*, 125.

states.”<sup>27</sup> This should be a lesson to some in the Church community today, who seek to dominate or “take” the city for Christ. Daniel’s long career as a Babylonian bureaucrat should cure us of that kind of blunted and truncated vision. Daniel served God throughout his career in his government job. His work was a light that penetrated the pagan darkness of the Babylonian bureaucracy. Larry Peabody points out that “Daniel had just as much of a specific call or vocation from God as Jeremiah. Yes, his call came less dramatically. But the same God who spoke the words that placed Jeremiah arranged the circumstances that placed Daniel in a government job in Babylon.”<sup>28</sup>

It is also important to see that the temporary nature of the Babylonian exile is a sign of temporary captivity. For the people of God and their relationship to the city, our state of “captivity,” while earth bound, will not be finally fulfilled until the new city of God appears. Daniel’s exemplary life illustrates the point that, “Babylon ceases to be Babel for a while, for one man. And then, afterwards, the captivity begins again. After Daniel receives the purple, he gets the lions’ den. This city is truly the place of the genuine captivity of the church.”<sup>29</sup> Keller further amplifies this point by explaining how:

This reflects the same balanced attitude that Jewish exiles were called to have toward Babylon. The Jewish exiles were not to hate the pagan city as they bided their time, waiting for the day of their departure. They were to be fully involved in its life, working in it and praying for it. At the same time, they were not to adopt its culture or lose their distinctive identity as God’s holy people. God called the Jewish exiles to accept and embrace the tension of the city for the sake of

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<sup>27</sup> Keller, *Loving the City*, 127.

<sup>28</sup> Larry Peabody, *Job-Shadowing Daniel: Walking the Talk at Work* (Outskirts Press, 2010), 26.

<sup>29</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 20.

God's glory – and this is exactly what today's Christians are called to do as well.<sup>30</sup>

In building a theology of the city, the Babylonian captivity helps to inform a theology of the city by providing instructional principles for how God's people should relate to the city. Namely, by faithfully engaging in the city for its good without being assimilated by it or becoming isolated within it. God's response to the city incorporates His people relating to city with this kind of faithful presence. Even as Jesus would go on to call his disciples "the salt of the earth" (Matt 5:13). In building toward a theology of the city, it is to Jesus and the city that we now turn.

### **Jesus and the City**

The third major theme presented in a biblical survey toward a theology of the city is Jesus and the city. The appearance of Jesus presents God's ultimate solution to the dilemma of humanity and the world. Through His Son, God will redeem what man has created and corrupted. The coming and work of Christ can be seen in light of a biblical theology of the city: "Thus the history of the city, divided in two by Jesus Christ, goes from Eden to Jerusalem, from a garden to a city. God created man in a garden, in the middle of the world."<sup>31</sup> Not by accident, Jesus's story will climax in a city, Jerusalem, and just as that city could not fulfill Israel's ambitions, no earthly king could fulfill its objectives until the King of Kings enters the story. Not only is Jerusalem the physical

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<sup>30</sup> Keller, *Loving the City*, 128.

<sup>31</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 173.

prototype city of spiritual Zion, but Jesus is the King of Zion, a spiritual fulfillment of Israel's longing for a physical King. As Alvin Padilla points out,

Jesus clearly embraced the idea of the importance of the city for the proclamation of the advent of the Kingdom of God. His central message is that the promises of God have begun to be fulfilled in His own person. He has arrived on the scene as the divine King ready to reclaim, redirect and redeem His people. To the cities, Jesus sends his disciples with a message: the Kingdom of God is at hand.<sup>32</sup>

The timing of Jesus' arrival was in step with a new Roman urbanization.

Significant to the tracing of a biblical theology of the city then, is to see that "into this urban world came Jesus of Nazareth. And with his coming came the inauguration of God's urban renewal plan. Babel's human quest for unity in rebellion is finally fulfilled in God's gift of unity in 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism.' God comes down again not to judge but to save in Christ."<sup>33</sup>

At the outset of his ministry the grounds of spiritual warfare were laid out by Satan. The temptation of Christ is accentuated by Satan's attempt to offer him the cities of the world as the crowning jewels of his earthly empire. All Satan could offer were these "kingdoms," (i.e. his cities). The Father had promised the Son an eternal kingdom (Ps 2; 110). Satan's offer was a cheap substitute then, for the New Jerusalem. Jesus' response was, "Away from me Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only'" (Matt 4:10). Jesus resisted the Devil by standing firmly on the cardinal truth of Scripture: worship God only (Deut 6:3). For the righteous people of God there

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<sup>32</sup> Alvin Padilla, "Jesus and the City," Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, 2009, <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/resources/Jesus-and-the-City.cfm>, accessed November 20, 2018.

<sup>33</sup> Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City, & the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), loc. 1528, Kindle.

would not even be a thought of bowing down and worshiping the prince of darkness. Jesus would hold to that principle; He would never worship Satan. Instead, He would receive the kingdom in God's time, and in God's way – by defeating Satan. Jesus' full victory at the cross, the resurrection, and his final second coming would usher in a far better kingdom than Satan and this world could ever offer.

In considering Jesus' relationship to the cities, it is significant to note that:

Jesus Christ has no conciliatory or pardoning words for the cities. But when he speaks to men he has both curses and pardon. Promises of salvation and warnings. When he speaks to the cities, he never has anything but words of rejection and condemnation. He never proclaims grace for man's work. All he recognizes is its devilish quality, and his only reaction is to struggle against the power of the city trying to hinder his work.<sup>34</sup>

Jesus relationship to the physical Jerusalem from the outset of his ministry to his death, resurrection and commissioning of his Church are a guide to the believers' relationship to the physical cities in which we live. To that end:

Luke reminds his readers of the pilgrimage's final goal – Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem (Luke 9:51, 53; 13:22; 17:11; 19:11). The redemptive plan can only be accomplished in the city of the Great King... the King enters His royal city, the city in which He will offer his life as a sacrifice for many.<sup>35</sup>

Jesus' obviously deep love for this city as displayed in his weeping over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41) is consistent with the character of God we have seen displayed throughout the Old Testament narrative, where God continually reached out with His redeeming grace to the city of man. Jesus now takes the final step. As evidenced in his own self-description, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay

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<sup>34</sup> Ellul, *Meaning of the City*, 113.

<sup>35</sup> Padilla, "Jesus and the City," <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/resources/Jesus-and-the-City.cfm>, accessed November 20, 2018.

his head” (Luke 9:58). Here, Jesus indicates how he is the one who bore the curse of Cain, and all of humanity. As Ellul explains:

At last we see the realization of a complete attitude of wandering. At last there appears before our eyes the one bearing Cain’s curse. Cain wanted nothing to do with his sentence. Cain revolted and built the city. It was against man’s will that he was nevertheless a wanderer on the face of the earth, broken away from his environment. But Jesus took the full condition of man, totally man, except for sin. But that means that he had to accept the consequences of sin. The God of heaven is a wanderer. He has taken Cain’s curse upon himself. Jesus will take the mark of Cain upon himself, He is willing to live a life fully under Gods protection with no fear for shelter in a home build by man. The city is not his home, it is a place to proclaim the Kingdom of God.<sup>36</sup>

At this point of the narrative Jesus also replaces Jerusalem as the “place” for all believers of all time, so that “the coming of Jesus significantly changed the status of Jerusalem and that Jesus himself claimed to be ‘greater than the temple’ (Matt 12:6).”<sup>37</sup>

As Inge points out:

Among New Testament authors there is a clear consensus that Jesus is the new temple that the genuine mercy seat, the true place of God’s presence, is no longer the Ark of the Covenant, but Christ crucified. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor 5:19), and as such Christ not only brought the temple system to a close, he is himself the spiritual temple, the new dwelling place of God. There is a further development in the first letter of Peter, where Christ remains the central figure but Christians themselves become “living stones” to be built with Christ (1 Pet 2).<sup>38</sup>

In summary, Jesus’ ministry climaxed in the city of Jerusalem, where he died and rose again. In his life, Jesus resisted Satan’s temptation to offer him the cities of the world. In his death, he took upon himself the curse of sin. It is only through Christ that a

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<sup>36</sup> Ellul, *Meaning of the City*, 121-122.

<sup>37</sup> John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place: Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology* (UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 54.

<sup>38</sup> Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 54.

true unity in the Lord can be achieved, as opposed to the unity couched in rebellion that was patterned after since the creation of Cain's first city. Finally, it is through Christ that his empowered people, the church are commissioned to take his good news back into the cities of this world.

### **The Church and the City**

The fourth significant theme in a biblical survey toward a theology of the city is the New Testament church and the city. At least two important matters are central to this theme, which could be referred to as an urban strategy and an urban lifestyle.

#### *An Urban Strategy*

The book of Acts reveals a prevailing urban focus and strategy that resulted in the rapid expansion of the gospel and kingdom of God. The empowering of the Church by the Holy Spirit, as Christ promised, took place in the city of Jerusalem. What follows in the book of Acts is a strategic city-centric focus by the Church, which spread the message of Christ throughout the Roman world. The noun "city" (Gr. *polis*) is used 160 times in the New Testament. About one half of this usage is found in Luke and the book of Acts.<sup>39</sup> The focus on the city is so paramount throughout the book of Acts, that "it is no exaggeration to say that the book of Acts deals almost entirely with cities; missionary work is almost limited to them."<sup>40</sup> Again, "the early Christian missionaries understood

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<sup>39</sup> Padilla, "Jesus and the City," <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/resources/Jesus-and-the-City.cfm>, accessed November 20, 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Conn and Ortiz, *Urban Ministry*, loc. 1616.



this concept quite well. Paul and other itinerant preachers gravitated to the cities of the Roman world as Acts, Luke's second volume, bears witness."<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the city plays such a dominant milieu in the New Testament records, that Wayne Meeks in *The First Urban Christians* claims that Pauline Christianity "was entirely urban."<sup>42</sup> He points out that the "the village culture of Palestine had been left behind, and the Greco-Roman city became the dominant environment of the Christian movement."<sup>43</sup> The pattern of this city-focused strategy displayed throughout the book of Acts is not merely an historical aside or non-essential detail, but rather represents a continuing principle for expanding the Church through an ongoing urban-focused strategy.

There are two important reasons why a city-focused strategy might be especially effective for the carrying out of the Great Commission. First, cities are situated in a central kind of place within the societies in which they exist. As Keller points out, if the gospel is "unfolded at the urban center, you can effectively reach the region and the surrounding society." To this point, John Stott also cites J.A. Alexander's insight that Acts shows the spread of the gospel "by the gradual establishment of radiating centres or sources of influence at certain salient points throughout a large part of the Empire."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Padilla, "Jesus and the City," <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/resources/Jesus-and-the-City.cfm>, accessed November 20, 2018.

<sup>42</sup> Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 8-11.

<sup>43</sup> Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 8-11.

<sup>44</sup> Keller, *Loving the City*, 131.

Ray Bakke also explains how first century cities became focal places of influence for the gospel:

The city not only edged dramatically into Jesus' life and ministry but subsequently became central to the future expansion of Christianity. It was from such metropolises as Antioch, Alexandria, Ephesus, Athens, Corinth and Rome that the gospel was carried into the countryside, where the rural sorts – the pagani (hence the term pagan) – were the last to convert. This Christianity which began in hamlets like Bethlehem and Nazareth in the person of Jesus finally came full circle through the mediation of urban culture.<sup>45</sup>

A second reason for which a city-focused strategy has great potential to transform societies is because of the unique social influence which they possess. Roland Allen further explains how Paul intentionally targeted cities and leveraged their cultural influence:

Paul's centres were centres indeed. He seized strategic points because he had a strategy. The foundation of churches in them was part of a campaign. In his hands they became the sources of rivers, mints from which the new coin of the Gospel was spread in every direction. They were centres from which he could start new work with new power. But they were this not only because they were naturally fitted for this purpose, but because his method of work was so designed that centres of intellectual and commercial activity became centres of Christian activity.<sup>46</sup>

Thus Paul's pattern of missionary work followed a city-focused strategy, where he sought to penetrate cities with the gospel, such that the gospel would continually keep sounding forth from those urban centers. It was in this vein that Paul commended the young church in the city of Thessalonica:

For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say

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<sup>45</sup> Ray Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), loc. 1206, Kindle.

<sup>46</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), 16.

anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thess 1:8-10).

As indicated by the Thessalonian church, the pattern which Paul articulated was one of cities receiving the gospel and then passing it on. Commenting on this passage, John Stott argues that “God intends every church to be like a sounding board, bouncing off the vibrations of the gospel, or like a telecommunications satellite which first receives and then transmits messages.”<sup>47</sup> This Pauline pattern is also echoed again by Bakke, who summarized Paul’s city-focused strategy by explaining:

When Luke reports that “all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10), he is not saying that everyone in Asia heard, but that the gospel was heard all over Asia. Paul penetrated the city; the gospel did the traveling. The city has always functioned like the woofer and tweeter of an amplifying system.<sup>48</sup>

For Paul then, cities became representatives of the entire world. It was in the planting and growing of churches in cities that Paul envisioned “the formation of new urban communities created and loved by God.”<sup>49</sup>

In summary, the New Testament theme of the church and the city reveals a prevailing urban strategy that particularly focuses on the city. Two reasons why a city-focused strategy is especially effective for carrying out the Great Commission are that cities are centrally situated in society and they possess a powerful social influence to

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<sup>47</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 43.

<sup>48</sup> Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City*, loc. 1476.

<sup>49</sup> Conn and Ortiz, *Urban Ministry*, loc. 1794.

transform society. The New Testament focus on urban strategy is also accompanied with attention to an urban lifestyle.

### *An Urban Lifestyle*

The success and growth of the New Testament Church in the City also involves the character of the church and its members within the context of their cities. This quality of character can be called an urban lifestyle. From the very outset of the Church's birth on the day of Pentecost, an immediate description was given that summarizes the Christian communities' lived out values and practices:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-47).

Luke's descriptions of the early church reveals a certain character of urban lifestyle, where we see a "specimen of what Christian love and unity in its perfection, and unchecked by contact with the world without, would, and perhaps someday will, produce."<sup>50</sup> In further reflecting on Luke's descriptions of the early Church, Ellicott points out that:

The writer dwells with a manifest delight on this picture of what seemed to him the true ideal of a human society. Here there was a literal fulfillment of his Lord's words (Luke 12:33), a society founded, not on the law of self-interest and competition, but on sympathy and self-denial. They had all things in common, not

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<sup>50</sup> Bible Hub, "Acts 2:44," in Pulpit Commentary, 2018, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/acts/2-44.htm>, accessed November 19, 2018.

by a compulsory abolition of the rights of property (see Acts 5:4), but by the spontaneous energy of love.<sup>51</sup>

Understanding that the Christian community, as displayed throughout the rest of the New Testament account, could never sustain this idyllic state, they were nevertheless called to pursue it. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes his people, “as a city on a hill” (Matt 5:14), the witness city. Drawing upon this imagery, Keller articulates how, “communities of Christ followers are God’s city within every earthly city.”<sup>52</sup> The lifestyle of believers and how they live as a community in their cities is of the upmost importance. Indeed, this “quality, distinctiveness, and beauty of our communal life must be a major part of our witness and mission to the world.”<sup>53</sup>

The chronicles of the New Testament Church in Acts and the Epistles are a living narrative of how communities lived out their new found faith and were diligent to provide a robust theological vision for the challenges and realities that they faced. This theological vision went beyond academic exercise or ministry praxis. As Keller describes, “the development of a theology of the city and of culture is neither a matter of systematic theology nor of concrete ministry practice. It is an aspect of theological vision.”<sup>54</sup> James Davidson Hunter presents a compelling theological vision for city life as he sees it lived out in the New Testament Church, explaining that:

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<sup>51</sup> Bible Hub, “Acts 2:44,” in Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers, 2018, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/acts/2-44.htm>, accessed November 19, 2018.

<sup>52</sup> Keller, *Loving the City*, 128.

<sup>53</sup> Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 259.

<sup>54</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 22.

Peter, who with so many others speaks of Christians as “exiles in the world” (1:1, 2:11) encouraging us to “live [our] lives as strangers here in reverent fear” (1:17). God is at work in our own place of exile, and the welfare of those with whom we share a world is tied to our own welfare. In this light, St. Peter encourages believers repeatedly to be “eager to do good” (3:17) and for each person to “use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (4:10). This understanding also comports with other New Testament admonitions to “never tire of doing right” (2 Thess 3:13), to “let your magnanimity be manifest to all” (Phil 4:5), and to “look to each other’s interest and not merely to your own” (Phil 2:4). As Paul writes elsewhere, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Cor 12: 7). All of this is in keeping with the instruction that the people of God are to be committed to the welfare of the cities in which they reside in exile, even when the city is indifferent, hostile, or ungrateful’<sup>55</sup>

In analysis of Hunter’s theological vision, James K.A. Smith observes that, “he envisions the church forming people who are sent into the contested terrain of the earthly city: “The vocation of the church is to bear witness to and to be the embodiment of the coming Kingdom of God.” This outpost of the “new creation” comprises “a different people and an alternative culture that is, nevertheless, integrated within the present culture.” This is why “beyond the worship of God and the proclamation of his word, the central ministry of the church is one of formation; of making disciples,”<sup>56</sup> and that means equipping the people of God so they can “learn to live with and reflect in life the dialectical tension of affirmation and antithesis.”<sup>57</sup>

It is within this tension that Paul, in addressing a dysfunctional church in Corinth, brings an essential, disciple-making lesson: “For now we see in a mirror indirectly, but

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<sup>55</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 278.

<sup>56</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 55.

<sup>57</sup> Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 55.

then we will see face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, just as I have been fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:12-13). The cohesive nature of these qualities are ascribed to Christian lifestyle for the now and the not yet, values to live by in the temporary cities of our day that will be fully realized one day in the city of God that is to come. As Charles Hodge points out, “What Paul wishes to impress upon the Corinthians is, that the gifts in which they so much prided themselves, were small matters compare to what is in reserve for the people of God...faith, hope and love. These are the three great permanent Christian graces.”<sup>58</sup> The virtues of faith, hope, and love are central then, to an urban lifestyle that informs a theological vision of the city.

### The Virtue of Faith

Lesslie Newbiggin has long contended that in pluralist contexts, which the city in most cases exemplifies, truth believed and contended for publicly, is of primary importance. According to Newbiggin, the essence of the congregation in a city is the greatest hermeneutic:

Only by making our perceptions public, sharing them with others, comparing our different perceptions and checking their reliability against those of others. On the one hand we have to take responsibility for what we claim to know by seeing and hearing and touching; on the other hand these claims, because they are claims to be in contact with a reality beyond ourselves, must be made “with universal intent.” We must seek to show others that they are valid.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1956), 274-275.

<sup>59</sup> Lesslie Newbiggin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), loc.4243, Kindle.

In order for the church to interpret and translate the message of Scripture, it has to first possess an informed knowledge of it. As Richard Lints notes,

It is a fundamental challenge facing contemporary theology to educate a church that is largely ignorant of the Scriptures and therefore largely ignorant of the controlling biblical image and metaphors that informed theology in ages past. The translation of the redemptive-historical message of Scriptures into the vernacular of modern culture will be meaningless unless and until the church is educated in the vernacular of the Scriptures. We have to go back before we go forward.<sup>60</sup>

The prevailing pattern of the city of man is to humiliate all absolute truth, which presents a challenge for believers to stand firm on the truths of their faith. As Ellul points out:

I can say this [that the world has meaning] only because I am a Christian. I know that the human adventure moves on to fulfillment, not in glory, but in a rupture followed by a recreation, which is the consummation of this whole history. If I step outside this faith, the human adventure has no orientation of its own. It is not true that history as such has meaning.<sup>61</sup>

What is being vied for is the claim that “we are not on earth by chance; we do not come from nowhere to go nowhere.”<sup>62</sup>

This spiritual battle for the minds and hearts of people is also reflected by Miroslav Volf, who explains that:

The modern world, differentiated as it is into multiple and relatively autonomous spheres, is a world of many gods. Each sphere—be it politics, law, business, media, or whatever—imposes its own rules upon those who wish to participate in it. In this new polytheism, we follow the voice of one god at work, another at home, and maybe yet another at church. Each sphere resists the claims of the one God to shape all of life.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Keller, *Loving the City*, 101.

<sup>61</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 15.

<sup>62</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 13.

<sup>63</sup> Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Public Good* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011), 14.



This is why the Apostle Peter says, “But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet 3:15). In applying these principles to city-dwellers, Keller points out that:

Peter charges all believers to give cogent reasons for their faith to non-Christians. Behind all these exhortations is the assumption that the word is dwelling richly in every Christian (Col 3:16). It means that every believer must read, ponder, and love the Word of God, be able to interpret it properly, and be skillful in applying it to their own questions and needs and to those of the people around them.<sup>64</sup>

In contemplating the work of the Church of England’s study “Faith in the City,” Newbiggin observes that, “the preaching and teaching of the local church has to be such that it enables members to think out the problems that face them in their secular work in the light of their Christian faith.”<sup>65</sup> Ellul observes that as critical as “seeing” our cities is, it is not enough because, “seeing is of the order of reality and is indispensable if we are to grasp the world. It sets us in the world and incites us to act in it. It does not lead to truth, and it does not give meaning. The word is what gives meaning to what we see.”<sup>66</sup> Volf observes that, “people misconceive faith and treat it as a performance-enhancing drug or a soothing balm rather than as a resource to orient their life in the world Christians instead should ‘show how faith...is a salutary way of life and inculcate its vision of lives well lived in all spheres.’”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 345.

<sup>65</sup> Newbiggin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, loc. 4523.

<sup>66</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 24.

<sup>67</sup> Volf, *A Public Faith*, 23.

The cardinal virtue of faith, is central then to an urban lifestyle because the Church is called to see and interpret meaning in world, in such a way that it provides cogent reasons for the truth of Christ, and applies those reasons to a vision and way of life in Christ. This deep-rooted and convictional faith provides us with a truth that goes beyond sustaining ourselves but becomes the hope of the City.

### The Virtue of Hope

The truth of the gospel sets us free to live out hopeful lives in the city. Through the gospel, “no longer does man belong to the city, exactly as he no longer belongs to the crowd, because his individuality has been affirmed by his encounter with Jesus Christ.”<sup>68</sup> The hope of the gospel is real, and living, because Christ rose from the dead. That is, “because Christ arose from the grave, from among the dead, we know that His death satisfied the justice of a holy God; we know that we are justified; we know that He conquered the grave and death; we know that we, too, shall be raised; we know that His Word is sure and that He will come again. This hope is our present possession.”<sup>69</sup>

This reality, lived out, should change our relationship to the city as followers of Christ. Because of the living hope that we have in Christ, we are given a calling and responsibility to share that hope through the words and workings of our lives. As Ellul explains:

But we are all, all of us who live in cities, here faced with our responsibility. Up till now everything seemed to be going on above our heads, out of our reach: the

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<sup>68</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 132.

<sup>69</sup> E. English Schuyler, *The Life and Letters of Saint Peter* (New York: Publication Office “Our Hope,” 1945), 159.

functioning of the city's power was partially shredded by man because he was the builder, but he was involved in it like a miserable tool, nothing but a kind of mechanical starter! And now we are at the center of his adventure both rejected and called, both possessed and freed. We are subjects of the city and involved in its condemnation, and yet we are the possible artisans of her adoption by God.<sup>70</sup>

Followers of Jesus are citizens of the city of God, even if living still in the city of man.

Christians are thus pilgrims, exiles who are spread throughout a dispersion. Passing through this world with primary allegiance to Christ, we are called to live out our primary identity in Christ and bring his influence to bear throughout our lives and cities. As Keller describes:

In many ways, this is also the form of the New Testament church, as Peter and James suggest when they address believers as “the Dispersion” and “exiles.” Twice Peter uses *parepidemoi* as a word for “exiles” – a word we sometimes translate as “resident aliens.” These exiles were citizens of one country and yet full-time residents of another. Their primary allegiance was to another country, and that country's culture was formative for their beliefs and practices. Yet they lived in their country of residence as full participants in its life. In other words, “resident aliens” lived neither as natives nor as tourists. Though they were not permanently rooted, neither were they merely travelers just passing through. Christians are now considered citizens of “the Jerusalem that is above.”<sup>71</sup>

Christians are thus called to be hope-spreaders throughout the cities in which we live. To live out this calling also involves discerning certain lines of separation between ourselves and the cities in which we live. Through engagement in the city, we are called to “become all things to all people,” that by all means some might be saved (1 Cor 9:22). On the other hand, the gospel also calls us to “not be conformed to this world,” but instead to be transformed (Rom 12:2) – even in hope of seeing the cities of the world also transformed for Christ. Ellul elucidates this tension by explaining how:

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<sup>70</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 71.

<sup>71</sup> Keller, *Loving the City*, 127.

Making a name for ourselves in the city’ that garnered the condemnation of God to the proper disposition as God’s people who now receive His blessing, ‘We must ask God to take away this condemnation which we know so well, and herein lies our liberty in relation to the city. It is our accomplishment of this act which shows that we are not captives like the others. This is the exact line of separation between ourselves and the city. Some are captives of the spiritual power which has embodied itself in the city, and they help to strengthen the city’s specifically anti-redemptive tendencies.’<sup>72</sup>

The call to be separate from the city must not be taken to an extreme of failing to faithfully engage with the city, which would be isolationism. We as the people of God, have deep meaning in being artisans that craft a hopeful future, build a witness city, and demonstrate a meaningful existence:

Every vocation is in some way a response to, and an extension of, the primal, Edenic act of cultivation. Artists, for example, take the raw material of the five sense and human experience to produce music and visual media; literature and painting; dance and architecture and theater. In a similar way, technologists and builders take the raw material of the physical world and creatively rearrange it to enhance human productivity and flourishing. Because we are called to create culture in this way, and because cities are the places of greatest cultural production, I believe that city building is a crucial part of fulfilling the mandate.<sup>73</sup>

Volf believes that, “our work can find its ultimate meaning when, in working for ourselves and for community, we work for God,”<sup>74</sup> that and “the work of each one of us is, then, a small contribution to the grand tapestry of life, which God is weaving as God created the world, is redeeming the world, and will consummate the world. This is the ultimate meaning of our work.”<sup>75</sup>

In his commentary on Augustine’s theological vision, James K.A. Smith writes:

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<sup>72</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 75.

<sup>73</sup> Keller, *Loving the City*, 133.

<sup>74</sup> Volf, *A Public Faith*, 33-35.

<sup>75</sup> Volf, *A Public Faith*, 33-35.

The citizen of the city of God, Augustine emphasizes, will always find herself thrown into a situation of being a resident alien in some outpost of the earthly city. Citizens of the heavenly city, Augustine tells us, lead “what we may call a life of captivity in this earthly city as in a foreign land, although it has already received the promise of redemption, and the gift of the Spirit as a kind of pledge of it.”<sup>76</sup>

This promise of redemption and gift of the Spirit should provide the believer with a deep sense of security and purpose. As Volf also reflects:

City-citizens that view their lives in this way live with deep missional meaning, ‘When it comes to life in the world, to follow Christ means to care for others (as well as for oneself) and work toward their flourishing, so that life would go well for all and so that all would learn how to lead their lives well. A vision of human flourishing and the common good is the main thing the Christian faith brings into the public debate.’<sup>77</sup>

What does it mean for Christians as hope-spreaders, to bring transformation to the city? This also needs clarification. This should not be taken as a mandate or assumption that we will cosmically transform the city itself, which is a dangerous and faulty theological vision. As Ellul helps to clarify:

Man is not counted on to transform the problem of the city. He is no more capable of transforming the environment chosen for him and built for him by the Devil, than he is of changing his own nature. There is no other way than that taken by Jesus in his incarnation. But today’s incarnation must be that of an already victorious truth into the heart of the city. Such is man’s calling. Such an assertion is, as a brilliant intellectual said not too long ago, “a rather narrow basis for action.” We said that God, by his act in Jesus Christ, made the city into a neutral world where man can be free again, a world where man designs possibilities for action. But it is no holy world. Let there be no confusion: there is no use expecting a new Jerusalem on earth. Jerusalem will be God’s creation, absolutely free, unforeseeable, transcendent. But God’s act gives man room for autonomous action.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Smith, *Awaiting the King*, xiii.

<sup>77</sup> Volf, *A Public Faith*, 142.

<sup>78</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 171-172.

In discerning our part in God's missionary plan for transformation, we should not be mournful or think ourselves dejected. Rather, as Bishop Inge points out:

If we are to mourn concerning the fact that here we shall find no abiding city, that all our experience of place in this world will be tainted, we are also called to have hope. We are to have hope that, just as sacramental encounter in the world and sacramental presence in the Eucharist come to us as pure gift, so too the eschatological gift of a place which Jesus has promised to prepare for his disciples will come to us in his good time.<sup>79</sup>

This understanding of future hope, of the "city yet to come," the now and the not yet, makes us a peculiar people, a transcendent tribe. As Ellul explains:

For even in resurrection God does not shatter men's hopes. Rather, he fulfills them there. And on the other side of death, in his new creation, God renders to man the setting he preferred. For we have a job to do in the city. We have seen that down through history God's answer to the construction of man's closed world was to move in just the same. And if he is there by his hidden presence, he is also there by those whom he sends. Our task is therefore to represent him in the heart of the city.<sup>80</sup>

We are thus given this gift of meaningful purpose: "The world which would be meaningless by itself, becomes a purposeful place as men make it so; and they are enabled to do this because they find a purpose for their lives in the man whose life was wholly one with God."<sup>81</sup> The city can never fully satisfy because it is finite and as Volf says, "Our striving can therefore find proper rest only when we find joy in something infinite."<sup>82</sup> Inge, in attempting to reconcile the import of our future hope to our present disposition, puts it this way,

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<sup>79</sup> Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 138.

<sup>80</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 181.

<sup>81</sup> Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 65.

<sup>82</sup> Volf, *A Public Faith*, 61.

The ultimate importance of the material that the Christian faith declares is something to which sacramental encounters in the church and the world point. They point towards our ultimate destiny which is to be implaced, where the nature of the places in which we will find ourselves will be a transfigured version of the places of the here and now. In God's grace, our occasionally transfigured experience of them now gives us a foretaste of the glory that is to be revealed to us in which the nature of these places, like our own, will be changed and not taken away.<sup>83</sup>

James K.A. Smith has noted that, "to be faithful citizens of the heavenly city is to learn how to actively wait, bearing witness to kingdom come."<sup>84</sup> Citizens of Zion see themselves in this sense as more than witnesses of the person of Christ, but also as ambassadors that reflect the place that He is preparing for us. Our meaning, in the cities where God has placed us is found in the building of foretaste communities that are not diametrically opposed aberrations of how we live now, but rather, the fully redeemed and perfected models of the loving, meaningful and truthful communities that we are presently part of. Therefore,

As united to Christ the Christian has not only a sure hope of a glorious future but an ever present source of strength in his spiritual service (2 Cor. 12:9). As believers await the assured hope of their eternal destiny with Christ, not only do they have the stabilizing influences of joy and peace, but they have the high privilege of serving him in their earthly walk. It is to be a labor of love (Eph. 4:15-16).<sup>85</sup>

This type of community, rich in faith and filled with purpose and meaning, now has a gift to offer the city. Volf believes that religion is "to help people grow out of their petty

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<sup>83</sup> Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 141.

<sup>84</sup> Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 15.

<sup>85</sup> Richard D. Patterson, "Foretaste of Glory," Biblical Studies Press (2012), 7, <https://bible.org/article/foretaste-glory>, accessed November 19, 2018.

hopes so as to live meaningful lives, and to help them resolve their grand conflicts and live in communion with others.”<sup>86</sup>

The virtue of hope is central to an urban lifestyle that informs a theological vision of the city. Followers of Christ have been given a living hope through Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, which frees them to live out hopeful lives and be hope-spreaders in the cities where they live. As ultimate citizens of the city of God, followers of Jesus are called to live as exiles and resident aliens whose primary allegiance belongs to Christ, and who must therefore negotiate the tension of what it means to live out their pilgrimage in the city of man. This involves carefully discerning lines of separation between ourselves and the city; while at the same time fully embracing the meaningful purpose of artisanship and faithful engagement with the city. While ultimate transformation of the city will not happen until the final city of God is consummated, nevertheless we can realize a foretaste of that heavenly city even now, which causes us to long with hope for that which is to come.

### The Virtue of Love

Love is the central and greatest testimony of the gospel. As the Apostle Paul announced: “...the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:13). Jesus said that a loving community is necessary for the world to know that God the Father had sent him (John 17:23), and the presence of God’s love in the Christian community is what provides the living evidence to the world of who Jesus’ followers really are (John 13:35). The Apostle

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<sup>86</sup> Volf, *A Public Faith*, 100.



John thus contends that it is this evidence of love for one another that separates believers from following the pattern of Cain:

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death (1 John 3:11-14).

In considering the centrality of love to the Christian message, Volf has also argued that:

From the very start, at the center of Christian faith was some version of the claim that God loved the sinful world and that Christ died for the ungodly (John 3:16; Rom 5:6), and that Christ's followers must love their enemies no less than they love themselves. Love doesn't mean agreement and approval; it means benevolence and beneficence, possible disagreement and disapproval notwithstanding. A combination of moral clarity that does not shy away from calling evil by its proper name and of deep compassion toward evildoers that is willing to sacrifice one's own life on their behalf was one of the extraordinary features of early Christianity. It should also be the central characteristic of contemporary Christianity.<sup>87</sup>

The ethic of love for each other in the believing community, and love for the world to which we have been sent, is what solidifies and warrants the truthfulness of the gospel message. Francis Schaeffer has thus argued rightly that Christians' relationships with each other constitutes the criterion the world uses to judge whether their message is truthful. It is in this sense that the Christian community is the "final apologetic."<sup>88</sup> The call to follow Christ's example of love is thus central to the Christian message.

The New Testament further delineates the nature of this love as being something much more than mere sentiments or words, but rather as constituting a deep-seated attitude that is expressed in sacrificial actions and service for others. The Apostle John

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<sup>87</sup> Volf, *A Public Faith*, 132.

<sup>88</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God who is There: The Book the Makes Sense out of your World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 29.

thus warned his readers to “not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18). The logic put forth by John is that God is love, and therefore those who truly know God will be increasingly be characterized by His love. Furthermore, God’s love was manifested in sacrificial action by the sending of His Son, and therefore those who truly know God will also come to exemplify this kind of love. This reasoning is advanced by John when he writes:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1 John 4:7-11).

The New Testament also describes the imperative of love as fundamentally involving service for others. The connection between loving one another and serving one another is articulated in many New Testament occasions, as Coon and Ortiz help to further elaborate:

*Diakonia* (service) exemplified, and still does, that communal ministry of love. In the city life of the empire the term was often used of the work of slaves. And Rome had more to use than had any previous society. As an integral but distant part of the extended household, slaves waited at tables (Luke 17:7-8). In the kingdom of God *diakonia* is transformed by Jesus' service on the cross (Mark 10:45), the compulsion of the messianic servant's “I must” (Luke 24:26). Human ideas of greatness and rank are reversed again as Jesus the Lord who was the servant becomes the object of our joyful and patient service in suffering (Rom 12:11; 14:17-18). Apostles become servants (1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 11:23), and the freedom of sonship demands that we “serve one another in love” (Gal 5:13).<sup>89</sup> Given the centrality of love, and the delineated instruction to express God’s love

in attitudes and actions of service, a theological vision for the city entails the Church actively engaging in the life of the city. What this means is that the Church cannot

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<sup>89</sup> Conn and Ortiz, *Urban Ministry*, loc. 1996.

“simply ‘check out’ of the project of statecraft and public life, because it is precisely the Cultural Mandate coupled with the second Great Commandment – to love our neighbors as ourselves – that propels us to love responsibility for the public life of the nations and communities in which we find ourselves as pilgrims and sojourners. Even when the city is Babylon, we are called to seek the welfare of the city (Jer 29:7).”<sup>90</sup> In this regard, Volf stresses that hope is actually found when God’s people live out the Great Commandment of love, because “the presence and activity of the God of love, who can make us love our neighbors as ourselves, is our hope and the hope of the world.”<sup>91</sup> It is to this point that the concluding recommendation of the Church of England’s thorough study of faith in the City states that, “A Christian community is one that is open to, and responsible for, the whole of the society in which it is set, and proclaims its care for the weak, its solidarity with all, and its values which lie beyond the mere satisfaction of material needs.”<sup>92</sup> The abiding virtue of love is the basis then, for the Church’s active engagement of service in the city.

This makes us, as Augustine says, think deeply about ourselves because “A people is the association of a multitude of rational beings united by a common agreement on the objects of their love, then it follows that to observe the character of a particular

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<sup>90</sup> Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 35.

<sup>91</sup> Volf, *A Public Faith*, 76.

<sup>92</sup> *Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation, The Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Commission on Urban Priority Areas* (UK: Church House Publishing, 1985), 59.

people we must examine the objects of its love.”<sup>93</sup> In light of Jesus’ prayer for the world to see Christians’ love for each other and to connect this with knowing that the Father has sent the Son, Keller has contended that “our mission cannot go forward without Christians being involved not only in calling people to conversion but also in service to the community and in doing justice.”<sup>94</sup> However, as Ellul admonishes, “man’s duty is not to execute God’s judgements. Man’s duty is not to establish God’s justice in God’s stead. On the contrary, all of the Bible’s teaching is there to show us that God establishes his own justice.”<sup>95</sup> Smith also observes that, “our eschatological orientation should change our expectations, not our goals. We shouldn’t shrink from hoping to bend our policy and public rituals in the direction of rightly ordered love, not so we can ‘win’ or ‘be in control,’ but for the sake of our neighbors, for the flourishing of the poor and vulnerable, for the common good.”<sup>96</sup>

The aim of the Church’s engagement and service in the life of the city should therefore be broadly oriented toward the good of the city. This is best done by living out God’s love incarnation-ally in the city. For as powerful and as evil the city may appear to be, its citizens are lonely captives of their creation. Ironically, the city can take on the loneliest of places, as Ellul points out, “the city is an almost indistinguishable mixture of spiritual power and man’s work. ‘I am never more alone than in a crowd,’ goes the

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<sup>93</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson, 1972, Reprint (London: Penguin Group, 1984), 19.24.

<sup>94</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 259.

<sup>95</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 7.

<sup>96</sup> Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 53.

obscene paradox. 'I am never freer than when faced with blank stares. To be simply a stranger is not to be a free man. This is the solitude of suicide, of a drowning man.'"<sup>97</sup>

The city is desperate for real love and real community, but unfortunately the Church is easily distracted from its primary focus of loving our neighbors. Too often, we keep asking the question "Who is our neighbor?" And oftentimes we answer this question wrongly because of our pre-supposed biases that alienate us rather than endear us to lost and searching souls. The Christian witness of love can often be threatened by our response to the social and political conditions that the city is negotiating. To this end, Smith points out that we need to understand that:

There's no "city limit" sign to the earthly city precisely because the earthly city is less a place and more a way of life, a constellation of loves and longing and beliefs bundled up in communal rhythms, routines, and rituals. Theological wisdom about the political begins when we stop asking where and start asking how. In other words grappling together to find redemptive answers to the hard questions the city is asking. So a Christian account of our shared social-economic-political life might be described more properly as a "public" theology—an account of how to live in common with neighbors who don't believe what we believe, don't love what we love, don't hope for what we await'.<sup>98</sup>

The Church is thus challenged to seek out the good of the city through living incarnation-ally in the city, and thereby serving in such a way that God's love is demonstrably brought to bear within the city. John Stott further clarifies this when he writes:

This process of urbanization constitutes a great challenge to the Christian church. On the one hand, there is an urgent need for Christian planners and architects, local government politicians, urban specialists, developers and community social workers, who will work for justice, peace, freedom and beauty in the city. On the other, Christians need to move into the cities, and experience the pains and pressures of living there, in order to win city-dwellers for Christ. Commuter

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<sup>97</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 169.

<sup>98</sup> Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 19.

Christianity (living in salubrious suburbia and commuting to an urban church) is no substitute for incarnational involvement.<sup>99</sup>

In summary, the enduring virtue of love is what characterizes an urban lifestyle and informs a theological vision of the city. The presence of God's love in the community of believers is the central and greatest testimony of the gospel. This love comes from God who is love, and who demonstrated His love by sending His Son to be sacrificed for the sins of the world. Christians who know God are thus called to embody God's love in attitude and express His love in sacrifice and service to others. This entails an active engagement of the Church in the life of the city, to pursue the good of the city. Such is done not by seeking to take over the city, but rather by living incarnation-ally within it in hopes of bringing the love of God to it.

The theme of the Church and the city helps to fill out a theology of the city by offering an urban strategy that appreciates the central place and social power of the city, along with an urban lifestyle of shared values and practice. Faith, hope, and love make up the nucleus of the Church's urban lifestyle. The fifth and final theme of our biblical survey toward a theology of the city comes from the book of Revelation, where we see the final chapter of the city.

### **The Final Chapter of the City**

Beginning with the Old Testament prophets, God's future redeemed world is depicted as a city. In the final chapter of God's story in Scripture, when God's creational and redemptive intentions are fully realized, we see that the result is indeed a city – with

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<sup>99</sup> Keller, *Loving the City*, 131.

walls and gates and streets (Rev 21-22). This city is different than all other cities, in that it is more of a “garden-city” that perfectly balances the glorious benefits of human density and diversity with the beauty and peace of nature. The coming garden-city comes as an expanded fulfillment of God’s original creation in the Garden of Eden. Keller helps to further explain:

What is most striking about this holy city is that it has not been built from scratch. In its midst flows a crystal river, and on each side of the river is the “tree of life” that bears fruit and leaves to heal the nations of all the effects of the divine covenant curse (Rev 22:1-3). This city is, in fact, the same garden we see in the Genesis account, which was also marked by a central river and the presence of the tree of life (Gen 2:8-10), but it had been expanded and remade into the garden-city of God. It is the Garden of Eden, yet faithfully cultivated – the fulfillment of the purposes of the Eden of God. Indeed, the very word used for “garden” in Genesis 2 denotes not a wilderness but a “park,” a well-tended plot of land one would find in a city or near a royal place.<sup>100</sup>

Revelation portrays again, albeit now with finality, the contrast between the city of God and Babylon as the city of man. The city of God’s old enemy, Babylon, is finally overthrown, and God’s people thrive in peace and productivity. As Ellul depicts:

In all her activities she affirms that her strength is all-sufficient: “A queen I sit, I am no widow, mourning I shall never see” (Rev 18:7). So she vaunts her power, even against death. She needs no one. Her base of power is no mere human being. She is her own reason for existing, in herself a sufficient power, a sufficient law. It must be very clear that in his act of building, man give birth to something stronger than himself. And it is neither the founder nor the inhabitants of the city who say so, but rather the city herself, in her personality independent both of men and of God. She says, “Forever will I be a sovereign.”<sup>101</sup>

Ellul goes on to describe that throughout history the power of the city of man is to blind humanity from the vision of God’s perfect city: “It is all intended to seduce men, to keep

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<sup>100</sup> Keller, *Loving the City*, 132.

<sup>101</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 52.

them from carrying out to the end the search implanted in their heart (Rev 18:23). There man ceases his wandering and doubt, satisfied not to leave the city in his search for genuine meaning and fulfillment.”<sup>102</sup>

When the final chapter of the city comes, believers pass from one dimension of the Kingdom into the next, now fully realized city of God. As citizens of Zion we are not for the first time experiencing the salvation or purpose of the city for we have been living under its power and grace already. As Inge so beautifully portrays,

There can be no doubt that there is a shift away from emphasis upon the earthly Jerusalem but salvation is still represented here in terms of a place. The culmination of the heavenly vision is the descent of the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God (Rev 21:10), resembling a gigantic hall in the form of a cube with sides measuring about 1500 miles (Rev 21:15-17), constructed of precious materials (Rev 21: 18-21), and on each side there are three gates (Rev 21:12-13). The light of this city is the glory of the Lord God and the Lamb (Rev 21:23) who sit at the centre of the city and from the throne flows the river of the water of life (Rev 22: 1), and at each side of it are the tree of life (Rev 22:2), and the fruit giving spiritual rather than physical nourishment (Rev 22:2). The images here are most certainly of a place, and the character of the place is something between a city and a garden.<sup>103</sup>

We see dimly, but soon we will see clearly; we experience in part, but then we will inherit the whole. This is paradoxical because we are actually given experiential influence in the fashioning of this city to come. Since we are created in God’s image, He doesn’t disavow who we are in His architectural vision, but rather chooses to incorporate who we are and what we have become as his creation, into His plans. This is further explained by Volf:

Consider the eschatological New Jerusalem Revelation describes as “coming down out of heaven from God” (Rev 21:2). It is not designed and built by

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<sup>102</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 54.

<sup>103</sup> Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 54.



Christians. And yet, it stands in continuity and not just discontinuity with the old order; it is said that the ‘people’ – non-Christian people! – will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.<sup>104</sup>

This is a subtle distinction but one that cannot be undermined. The new city in its redeemed and enlightened appearance is so completely majestic that it is as startling and magnificent as God’s original creation. As Ellul explains:

The New Jerusalem is to be established at the end of time, but absolutely not by any human effort. She is a creation of God, and her nature, therefore, is the opposite of a golden age. Instead of being the continuation of history, the crowning act of history is a break with history. The second creation stands over against the first, which it is impossible to draw back from destruction. But the second creation is just as extraordinary, unbelievable and unexpected as the first. So all of man’s efforts to produce it on his own run into an invisible and impassable wall. He can act in history, but he can neither finish it nor transcend it. And this brings out the last characteristic of this opposition: the transcendent history we are speaking of is not any kind of return to nature, but rather is extra-natural.<sup>105</sup>

Here the futility of man is exposed, the absurdity of humanity’s endeavors apart from God revealed. Namely, “man wanted to build a city from which God would be absent, but he never managed. God will make for him the perfect city, where he will be all in all.”<sup>106</sup>

In light of God’s coming prophetic city in the final chapter of His story, we might be tempted to ask ourselves, why build, invest, or work at all? If it is entirely God’s work, His new creation, are we not made obsolete and should we not disengage from any participation in the city of man? Keller answers this objection by explaining that,

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<sup>104</sup> Volf, *A Public Faith*, 93.

<sup>105</sup> Volf, *A Public Faith*, 163.

<sup>106</sup> Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 174.

“Revelation shows us this is not the case. God’s intention for human endeavor is that it raise up civilizations – cities – that glorify him and steward the endless wonders and riches that God put into the created world. This insight has led Harvie Conn to write that the cultural mandate ‘could just as easily be called an urban mandate.’”<sup>107</sup> Our role, our witness, stands as a signpost of opposition to the futility that humanity wrapped up in the city of man experiences in the emptiness that they feel in their work.

The final city of God offers an abundant fulfillment to the desires of human existence by providing a lasting satisfaction of roots, place, and destination. To this end, Inge writes that, “this has been poignantly expressed by Zygmunt Bauman, who characterizes the self in postmodernity as a vagabond: ‘a pilgrim without a destination; a nomad without an itinerary.’ The Christian community can witness to the fact that roots, place and destination are all important to human existence.”<sup>108</sup> Roots speak to beliefs and faith, place speaks to belonging and love, and destination speaks to purpose and hope. The vision of God for the city, wrapped in faith, hope and love is God’s gift to His people. What Cain had built in rebellion at the beginning in the city of man, God will one day redeem in love at the end – in the city of God.

### **Conclusion of Biblical Survey Toward a Theology of the City**

In conclusion, the Bible reveals a rich theological portrait of the city, including its nature, role, and characteristics; along with God’s disposition, plan, and missionary calling toward it. This chapter explored five significant themes progressively revealed

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<sup>107</sup> Keller, *Loving the City*, 134.

<sup>108</sup> Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 137.

through the metanarrative of Scripture that fill out a theology of the city. First, the creation of the first city was predicated upon Cain's attempt to defy God by building the city as a way of embodying self-protection and seeking to gain an identity apart from Him. This pattern of rebellion was further perpetuated by Nimrod in the proliferation of other early cities in Genesis. Babel became the ancient culmination of the city project that was intended as a prideful expression of resisting God's commands and purposes, in an effort to further establish independence from God.

Second, God's response to the city was highlighted in the stories of Sodom, Jonah and Nineveh, and Babylon and the captivity. The story of Sodom revealed God's redemptive disposition toward the city, expressed by way of Him using His people and their presence to bear His influence and bring others to Himself. Through the story of Jonah and Nineveh was underscored God's redemptive disposition toward, important regard for, and missionary calling to – the city. Babylon and the captivity provided instructional principles for how God's people should relate to the city by faithfully engaging their presence and influence in the city for its good, without being assimilated by it or becoming isolated within it. Finally, the Old Testament books of Isaiah, Psalms, and Ezekiel highlighted the contrast between the city of God and the city of man. Namely, the city of God is one that pervades with His peace, protection, provision, and presence. This is set in stark contrast to the city of man, which is marked out by pride, selfishness, insecurity, and sin.

The third theme, Jesus and the city, demonstrated how Jesus' ministry climaxed in the city of Jerusalem, where he died and rose again. When he was tempted, Jesus resisted Satan's temptation to offer him the cities of the world. In his death, he took upon himself

the curse of sin. It is only in Christ that a true unity in the Lord can be achieved, as opposed to the unrealized attempts at unity, couched in rebellion, which were patterned after since the creation of Cain's first city. Furthermore, it is through Christ that his empowered people, the church, is commissioned to take his good news back into the cities of the world.

Fourth, the church and the city outlined at least two important matters toward a theology of the city: an urban strategy and an urban lifestyle. The book of Acts reveals a prevailing urban focus and strategy that resulted in the rapid expansion of the gospel and kingdom of God. A city-focused strategy was shown to be significant because cities are centrally situated within the societies in which they exist, and they possess a unique power for social influence. The success and growth of the New Testament Church in the city was also shown to be connected to the character of the church and its members within the context of their cities, (i.e. an urban lifestyle). The chronicles of the New Testament Church in Acts and the Epistles demonstrate how communities lived out their new found and faith provided a robust theological vision for the challenges and realities that they faced. At the nexus of this urban lifestyle are the virtues of faith, hope, and love. The virtue of faith is central to an urban lifestyle because the Church is called to see and interpret meaning in world, in such a way that it provides cogent reasons for the truth of Christ and applies those reasons to a vision and way of life in Christ. Hope also informs a theological vision of the city, as believers are called to carefully negotiate the tension of what it means to live as pilgrims in the world, who live with hope for the eternal City of God. The virtue of love is the central and greatest testimony of the gospel. The Church is called to embody and express God's love in the service of others in the

city, for the good of the city, as it lives incarnation-ally within the city and seeks to bring God's love to it.

Finally, the fifth theme that fills out a theology of the city is the final chapter of the city. In Revelation, the final City of God comes as an expanded fulfillment of God's original creation in the Garden of Eden; a future garden-city. The coming of the city of God will include the final contrast between Babylon as the city of man and God's perfect city filled with peace and productivity. Here, the desires of humanity will one day be fully realized by God's people.

This chapter has provided a biblical and theological foundation with which to inform and conduct this research project. The following Chapter Three builds upon this foundation by reviewing the relevant literature concerning the two principal domains of this research study: gospel city movements and collective impact.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

This research study explored the common identity and unique expressions of current largescale gospel city movements (GCMs) in the U.S., and the perceived applicability and usefulness of the collective impact (CI) model to current GCMs in the U.S. By reviewing the relevant literature concerning the two domains of GCMs and CI, this chapter generates a grounded framework to stimulate and direct the exploratory design of this study. This chapter begins by considering GCMs with respect to their historical antecedents and developments, their recent theological and practical underpinnings, and the major commonalities of their shared characteristics. Next, the literature on CI is reviewed and summarized. Based upon the findings derived from the literature review of these two domains, appropriate conclusions are summarized as a rational basis warranting the need, relevancy, and direction of this present research study.

#### **Review of Relevant Literature on Gospel City Movements**

The following review of GCMs begins by considering their historical antecedents and developments. This historical background traces significant movements of church

history from the New Testament era to the formation of America and 20<sup>th</sup> century ecclesiastical expressions, thereby providing contextual perspective on the thinking and aspirations that have shaped present-day GCM formulations. Since its inception the Church has responded dynamically to the changing cultural and societal realities it has faced. Although this study concerns itself with how the U.S. evangelical Church is responding to their present socio-cultural realities, particularly in light of a growing urban context, it is beneficial to survey how the Church has responded in prior historical contexts from its inception. By trailing the responses of the New Testament Church through the formation of America and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this review will highlight how the Church has continually adapted its missional expressions through different states of formation and reformation. A more in-depth analysis will focus on the Great Awakenings, revivals, prayer, social gospel and transformation movements, as recent antecedents that inform the precedence for shaping the aspirations and thinking behind present-day GCM formations and their efforts to fulfill God's mission in their cities.

### **Church Formation from the New Testament to America**

No serious understanding of the formation of CGM's can be undertaken without an understanding of the essence of who the Church is and what forms it has taken historically. As Hans Kung proposes, "Enormous tasks, both familiar and unfamiliar, confronts a Church that sees itself as part of this changed and changing world and claims to exist for the world."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, it is imperative that GCMs be seen and understood through a historical lens, because as David Currie points out:

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Kung, *The Church* (New York: Image Books, 1968), 22.

The church began in the city, Jerusalem, and the church will end in the city, the New Jerusalem (Rev 21). Therefore, viewing the broad sweep and historical arc concerning how the church and the city have mutually influenced one another over the past 2000 years can help contemporary churches and ministries press into God's urban future for his people.<sup>2</sup>

In the New Testament, the first usage of the word church (Gr. *ekklesia*) is found in Matthew 16:18, where Jesus prophetically announces that “On this rock I will build my church.” In his book, *An Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century*, Timothy Tennent points out that the word “*ekklesia*” was a common Greek word that was used to refer to a public assembly, a public gathering of people at the center of society.<sup>3</sup> Douglass Hall further elaborates on the nature of *ekklesia* as a living and organic system of people: “The corporate church in the city is a living system. The word of God speaks to an organic unity called ‘the church,’ not to a collection of individuals, nor to an organization.”<sup>4</sup> This explanation of the Church is commensurate with GCMs and their missional proclivity towards a public witness in the center of city life.

Since the Church is “living” it has a latent potential for adapting its forms in response to the challenges and opportunities resonant in the social-cultural milieu in

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<sup>2</sup> David Currie, “Ecclesiapolis: Two Millennia of Mutual Transformation between Church and City,” in *Reaching for the New Jerusalem: A Biblical and Theological Framework for the City*, ed. Seong H. Park, Aida B. Spencer, and William D. Spencer (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013), 38.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy C. Tennent, *An Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010), 436.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas A. Hall, Judy Hall, Steve Daman, and Jeffrey Boss, “Living-System Ministry Ushers in the New Jerusalem,” in *Reaching for the New Jerusalem: A Biblical and Theological Framework for the City*, ed. Seong Hyun Park, Aída Besançon Spencer, and William David Spencer (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 86.



which it exists. This responsiveness is evidenced historically by the way in which the church has repeatedly taken on new forms. As Hans Kung explains, the essence or essential nature of the church “is not a matter of metaphysical status, but exists only in constantly changing historical forms.”<sup>5</sup> Relatedness between church communities is integral to the form in which the church expresses itself, both in the New Testament and throughout church history.

In the New Testament, the issue of relatedness between local church communities is raised from the earliest moments of the church’s infancy. For example, in the book of Acts, we see questions of the Jewish, Gentile, and Hellenistic churches being discussed. Kung observes that in the early Church there arose a “multiplicity of different types of churches,” noting that “the same thing is not suitable for everyone at the same time and same place.”<sup>6</sup> In the New Testament Epistles, the apostles planted city churches that emerged with unique strengths and weaknesses, diverse theological challenges, and distinctive cultural particularities and personalities. By the writing of Revelation, these differences are highlighted in the description of the seven churches, as “John, exiled to Patmos, had been given instructions to write a letter to each, with specific admonitions, criticisms, warnings and instructions; seven letters which describe and characterize the concrete situation of the church in its various locations.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Kung, *The Church*, 23.

<sup>6</sup> Kung, *The Church*, 355.

<sup>7</sup> Trey Dunham, *Jesus and the City: A Theology of Technique in Jacques Ellul* (Trey Dunham, 2016), 114.

On one hand, the reality of disunity among local church communities is evident during the earliest stages of the New Testament church. However, this reality should be seen more as descriptive – as the way things sometimes are, rather than prescriptive – as the way in which things should be. This is played out in In 1 Corinthians 3, where Paul spoke to the disunities that had arisen in the Corinthian church: “For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future – all are yours, and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s” (1 Cor 3:21-23). Here, Paul’s remedy was to plea for the essential unity that the Corinthians already possessed, and to admonish them to practically express that unity in their church community: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Cor 3:16). Therefore, while the reality of disunity is evident even in the early stages of the New Testament, it does not mean that it should be accepted as the common norm. To this point, Newbigin portends that “... any serious reading of the New Testament must surely make inescapable the reality, that to speak of a plurality of churches is strictly absurd. That we can only do so in the sense that we have ceased to understand the word ‘Church’ and what the New Testament means by it; that most of our versions of ecclesiology are in the Pauline sense absurd.”<sup>8</sup> This perspective grounds the thinking of GCM advocates such as Tom White, who believes that over time although the early Church developed “groupings around cultural affinities, worship styles, leadership, etc.”

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<sup>8</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1953), 22.

that they still maintained the ethos of “one Church in the City with multiple congregations.”<sup>9</sup>

Throughout early church history, we continue to see the church constantly changing its historical forms in light of how it understands and relates to itself and to an ever-changing world. This is evidenced by early church councils that arose to discuss different theological issues. The first of these is found in Acts 15 where the Jerusalem Council settled the dispute over Gentiles and their inclusion in the Church. In 325 A.D., The ecumenical Council of Nicaea was convened by Constantine to settle questions of Christology in the church. This Council was followed by several others, that helped to establish the early creeds which even to this day have shaped the foundation for orthodox Christian faith as a basis for unity.

After the schism of 1054 A.D., the Eastern Orthodox and Western Catholic traditions didn’t officially and overtly grapple with the question of local church relationships because they officially operated under a single structure of church authority. Nevertheless, internal disputes within the Church still resonated and ultimately culminated in the breaking out of the Protestant Reformation. Timothy Tennent highlights that:

The sixteenth century witnessed the culmination of a long-standing dissent movement within the church that finally broke out into what became known as the Reformation. Once the Reformers officially severed their ties with Rome and the movement grew in size and scale, it became necessary for Christians to, once again, reconceptualize the church in new ways.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Tom White, *City Wide Prayer Movements: One Church, Many Congregations* (Sisters, OR: Servant Publications, 2001), 52.

<sup>10</sup> Tennent, *An Invitation to World Missions*, 38.

As the reformation movement grew in size and scale, it became necessary for Christians to keep adapting and reforming the church. Bosch argues that in the early stages of the reformation there was actually little missionary outreach, explaining that “very little happened by way of a missionary outreach during the first two centuries after the Reformation.”<sup>11</sup> While there are numerous reasons for this, broadly speaking “the attitude was that no human being could undertake any mission work; God would, in his sovereignty see to this.”<sup>12</sup> At a local level, which is more germane to this study of mission in the city, most Reformers besides Puritan and Pietistic movements, held to a strong Theocratic theology. This is exemplified by Cromwell’s vision of England, that was “dreaming of transforming England into a theocracy; an integration of religion and politics was intended to reflect the will of God for the Church and nation.”<sup>13</sup> Theocraticism was also evident in Calvin’s vision of a “Christian City” in Geneva, and an even more militaristic city-church experiment in Zwingli’s Zurich. Although this theology lingered and in some circles is still manifest today, “the Enlightenment would make it impossible to conceive of mission as building a theocracy on earth.”<sup>14</sup>

Through the Enlightenment period, a theological disposition rapidly grew toward individual biblical interpretation, and thousands of local expressions of Christianity spawned. During this era new expressions of church relatedness began to emerge.

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<sup>11</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 234.

<sup>12</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 239.

<sup>13</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 248.

<sup>14</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 249.

Unfortunately, in many cases the resulting impact has been negative, resulting in competition and indifference of churches relating to each other. Reflecting on the negative effects of church splintering, and consequent church competition, Kung observes that, “the effects of the conflicting plurality of Churches are disastrous...the disunity and mutual rivalry is in part responsible for the widespread failure of the Christian mission to the world.”<sup>15</sup> Not only did this sense of competition and rivalry between churches damage the Church’s mission, but the multiplication of denominations also produced a looming attitude of indifference. As Kung also reflects, “The co-existence of different Churches doesn’t in itself jeopardize the unity of the Church; unity is only endangered by co-existence, which is neither co-operation nor support.”<sup>16</sup>

Notwithstanding these critiques, it can also be argued that the Reformation and subsequent Enlightenment spirit also brought a growing freedom to interpret the Scriptures in indigenous contexts, which had positive results such as newly found expressions of the Church. In *Whose Religion is Christianity?* Lamin Sanneh contends that the gospel beyond the West makes a strong case for Christianity’s growth coming from its freedom to interpret the Word in an indigenous context, producing vibrant expression, cross-cultural uniqueness and novel structures.<sup>17</sup> This historical perspective helps us appreciate the tension between the power of diversity and the fracturing nature of disunity that has always been a challenge to the Church’s effective mission.

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<sup>15</sup> Kung, *The Church*, 350.

<sup>16</sup> Kung, *The Church*, 357.

<sup>17</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 10-12.

From its earliest beginnings in the New Testament, to the forming of North America, the Church has been forming, splintering and reforming. Through councils, revivals and reformations the Church has sought both theologically and in praxis to understand and operate in light of who the Church is and how it relates to itself and adapts to a constantly changing world. North America, in many ways, was formed, or at least heavily impacted, by churches seeking to fulfill their missional destiny.

The missionary nature of the Pietistic, Puritan, and Moravian movements propelled the pioneering of American churches, and established a historical basis for unity and mission that is foundational to GCMs today. Bosch observes that, “Pietism ushered in the age of ecumenism in mission in that it aimed at a Christian fellowship that transcended the boundaries of nations and confessions; the Moravian brethren, in particular, were ecumenical through and through.”<sup>18</sup> This missional and ecumenical spirit, coupled with communities fleeing persecution in Europe, was a critical element in the pioneering of what would become the United States. These Christian movements that helped establish a new nation with such passion and fervor would soon be confronted, as all movements are, with the need to organize and consolidate. As the national identity and contours of the United States begin to emerge, after realizing its independence from England, two Great Awakenings helped shape not only its spiritual future, but also its socio-cultural ethos.

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<sup>18</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 244.

## The Great Awakenings of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries

There is no general consensus on the number of Great Awakenings that have happened in North America. Schlossberg purposes that there have been three.<sup>19</sup> However, there is little dispute about the acknowledgement and time frame the First Great Awakening of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the Second Great Awakening of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some debate exists concerning the nature and timing of a possible Third Great Awakening. Herbert Schlossberg contends that a Third Great Awakening took place following World War Two, but admits that this is a contested proposition. For example, Peter Berger and Martin Marty saw the proposed Third Great Awakening as “largely superficial and lacking in theological bite.”<sup>20</sup> William McLoughlin contends that there have actually been five Great Awakenings, suggesting that the Third Great Awakening was the emergence of the progressive wing of the North American Protestant Church and the resurgence of higher criticism, social Darwinism, and the social gospel.<sup>21</sup> This more theologically liberal perspective is challenged by conservative historians who identify the Prayer Awakening of 1857 and the subsequent emergence of the Urban Revivals, as another distinct Great Awakening.<sup>22</sup> Historians also differ on the present state of whether we have or are currently experiencing another Great Awakening, as “some observers of the current religious scene report glimpses of a Fourth Great Awakening, while others see

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<sup>19</sup> Herbert Schlossberg, “How Great Awakenings Happen.” *First Things* 106, (October, 2000), 46-51.

<sup>20</sup> Schlossberg, “How Great Awakenings Happen,” 46-51.

<sup>21</sup> William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakening, and Reform* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 141-178.

<sup>22</sup> McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakening, and Reform*, 141.

only a secularist wasteland.”<sup>23</sup> McCullough sees Neo-Evangelicalism and the “born-again” phenomena as the avant-garde of a new Awakening.<sup>24</sup> Despite these variations of historical interpretation, what is clear is that the North American Church has indeed passed through distinctive moments in its history that have provided dramatic revitalizations. For the sake of this study we will handle the spiritual revitalization from 1730-1760 as the First Great Awakening and the renewal from 1800-1830 as the Second Great Awakening. All other subsequent revitalizations will be considered as movements and revivals.

While the two Great Awakenings witnessed divine outpourings, they also represented thoughtful human responses to secularizing forces that had produced declines in the number of Christians and the influence of the Church. Careful and intentional human leadership took measured steps and worked diligently to insure that the Church could respond in new ways to the challenges and opportunities that it faced. These efforts galvanized and united a large percentage of the Church to think and act in harmonious ways. The movements produced by these Awakenings not only impacted the life of the American Church but also produced tangible social and cultural outcomes.

By the early 18<sup>th</sup> century much of the missionary fervor of the Christian movements that helped discover and develop the New Colonies had died out. Their vision of a Christian utopia had faded. From the time of the early Pilgrims, the prevailing sentiment was to create a Christian society in the words of Massachusetts Governor John

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<sup>23</sup> Schlossberg, “How Great Awakenings Happen,” 46.

<sup>24</sup> McCullough, *Revivals, Awakening, and Reform*, 213.



Winthrop, which would represent “a shining city upon a hill.”<sup>25</sup> This vision would soon diminish, as Beardsley explains: “With the passing away of the first generation of these men, the spirit of self-sacrifice and devotion to sublime moral ideals was not transmitted unimpaired to their immediate posterity. In fact, as time elapsed a decline in religion and morality became very apparent.”<sup>26</sup> Writing in 1842, Joseph Tracy also reported on the historical decline of Christianity that preceded the First Great Awakening:

Such had been the downward progress in New England. Revivals had become less frequent and powerful. The difference between the church and the world was vanishing away. Church discipline was neglected, and the growing laxness of morals was invading the churches. And yet never, perhaps, had the expectation of reaching heaven at last been more general, or more confident. The young were abandoning themselves to frivolity, and to amusements of dangerous tendency, and party spirit was producing its natural fruit of evil among the old.<sup>27</sup>

The response to this erosion of faith in American life would give rise to the First Great Awakening, which began to give early shape to Evangelicalism. According to Frances Fitzgerald,

The origins of Evangelicalism as a distinct form of Protestantism lie in the revivals that swept back and forth across the English-speaking world and Northern Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Everywhere, the revivals involved a rebellion against the formalism of the established churches and an effort to recover an authentic spiritual experience: a religion of the heart, as opposed to the head.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Mark David Hull, “Did America Have a Christian Founding?” The Heritage Foundation, June 7, 2011, <https://www.heritage.org/political-process/report/did-america-have-christian-founding>, accessed May 21, 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Frank G. Beardsley, *A History of American Revival* (New York, NY: American Tract Society, 1904), 8-9.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards and Whitefield* (New York, NY: Charles Tappan, 1845), 8.

<sup>28</sup> Frances Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 13.

McLoughlin extends Fitzgerald's viewpoint on the first Great Awakening as he sees it as producing an even more profound effect on American culture, contending that "Awakenings have been the shaping power of American culture from its inception."<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, McLoughlin also provides a corrective to the notion that the Great Awakenings were merely bent toward emotionalism. Rather, he contends that the Great Awakenings:

Were not brief outbursts of mass emotionalism by one group or another but profound cultural transformations affecting all Americans and extending over a generation or more. Awakenings begin in periods of cultural distortion and grave personal stress, when we lose faith in the legitimacy of our norms, the viability of our institutions, and the authority of our leaders in church and state. They eventuate in basic restructurings of our institutions and redefinitions of our social goals.<sup>30</sup>

Not only did the First Great Awakening respond to and affect cultural shifts, but it also began to reshape the Church's practical ecclesiology. As Thomas Kidd explains, "the American evangelical tradition that began to take shape in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was a new elaboration of the Reformation."<sup>31</sup> Corroborating with this perspective, Charles Maxson also insists that "the Great Awakening is therefore best defined, not as successive waves of religious excitement, but as an inter-colonial evangelical movement."<sup>32</sup> This movement, according to Maxson, brought about national transformation as "the religious energies liberated by the Great Awakening were

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<sup>29</sup> McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, 1.

<sup>30</sup> McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (Yale University, 2007), xiv.

<sup>32</sup> Charles Hartshorn Maxson, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies*, 1920, Reprint (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 141.

transformed into forces, social, humanitarian, educational, and political, which have been of almost incalculable importance in the making of the American people.”<sup>33</sup>

This historical perspective stands against popular interpretations of the First Great Awakening that tend to see it as a spontaneous, dramatic, and leaderless occurrence. Rather, the First Great Awakening can be better understood as a natural outgrowth of the American Church and its original theological determination. Prior to the First Great Awakening, “since their migration in the 1690’s, the Puritans had viewed themselves as the pioneers of God’s new Zion.”<sup>34</sup> This American “evangelical” spirit appears to constantly and consistently, throughout its history, drive the Church back to its original missional intent. Therefore, “The Great Awakening was not wave on wave of excitement which, having passed, left no trace upon the placid waters. It was a powerful ferment which was destined to revolutionize colonial society.”<sup>35</sup>

Timothy Dwight, grandson of Jonathan Edwards the leading figure in the First Great Awakening, was a central catalyst for the Second Great Awakening. Dwight’s approach was intentional: “It was not a spontaneous upwelling of faith, but a calculated endeavor, planned and executed for conservative evangelicals.”<sup>36</sup> On this point of view, Kidd also adds that “One cannot discount the role that simple hard work played in

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<sup>33</sup> Maxson, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies*, v.

<sup>34</sup> Stephan Berk, *Calvinism versus Democracy: Timothy Dwight and the Origins of American Evangelical Orthodoxy* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1968), ix.

<sup>35</sup> Maxson, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies*, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Maxson, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies*, x.

generating the awakenings.”<sup>37</sup> Thoughtful and purposeful leadership helped steward the Second Great Awakening, as leaders worked to analyze their situation by inquiring into the social experience of the people involved, and responding in step with the message of the gospel.<sup>38</sup>

The Second Great Awakening sparked a tremendous and steadied increase of religious consciousness. During this time:

Missionary and unity characteristics were not immune to the sweeping pressures of the Enlightenment and subsequently Deism had taken root, by the time of Independence (1776) only about five percent of the population of the new nation were church members. However, by the year 1800 the percentage of church membership had almost doubled; it has steadily increased ever since then, reaching a peak of about sixty percent in 1970.<sup>39</sup>

Bosch attributes this almost solely to the Second Great Awakening, as “Defense turned to offense. Optimism gripped Evangelicals.”<sup>40</sup>

Characteristically, those that are identified as “generating” revivals are usually careful to acknowledge God’s providence in the process. While an utter dependency upon God’s sovereign grace is clear, it is also true that God uses human means and instrumentality to accomplish His work. In *Inventing the Great Awakening*, Frank Lambert thus states that, “while recognizing that genuine revival of religion was God’s work, revivalists believed that human ‘means’ were conduits of divine outpourings of

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<sup>37</sup> Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, xviii.

<sup>38</sup> Sandra Sizer, “Politics and Apolitical Religion: The Great Urban Revivals of the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Church History* 48, no. 1 (March 1979), 84.

<sup>39</sup> Sizer, “Politics and Apolitical Religion,” 269.

<sup>40</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 286.

grace.”<sup>41</sup> In studying the Great Awakenings, it is evident that individuals believed that new approaches and techniques were necessary as a response to the socializing factors of the day. During these eras, “successive waves of mass revivals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries embodied an industrial approach to religion.”<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, “During the second Great Awakening of the early nineteenth century, believers adapted other elements of urban, industrial society to catalyze and organize the church to respond to rapid cultural changes.”<sup>43</sup> Reflecting on this idea from a psychological perspective, Clifford Geertz offers this explanation concerning the plausibility of religious belief:

In religious belief and practice a group’s ethos is rendered intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life ideally adapted to the actual state of affairs the worldview describes, while the worldview is rendered emotionally convincing by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs peculiarly well-arranged to accommodate such a way of life.<sup>44</sup>

To this point, McLoughlin adds that “this is what occurs in the religious excitement of an awakening.”<sup>45</sup>

The revitalization that these movements produced moved well beyond personal spiritual renewal and conversion. That is, “revitalization of the individual led to efforts to revitalize society.”<sup>46</sup> At the outset of the First Great Awakening, Edwards declared that

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<sup>41</sup> Frank Lambert, *Inventing the “Great Awakening”* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 8.

<sup>42</sup> Currie, “Ecclesiapolis,” in *Reaching for the New Jerusalem*, 49.

<sup>43</sup> Currie, “Ecclesiapolis,” in *Reaching for the New Jerusalem*, 49.

<sup>44</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (NY: Hachette Book Group), 89-90.

<sup>45</sup> McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, 16.

<sup>46</sup> McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, 75.

the “New Jerusalem” would not be “accomplished at once,” as by some miracle but rather would be “gradually brought to pass,” presumably through human effort in cooperation with God’s grace.<sup>47</sup> Berk identifies the Second Great Awakening, as an evangelical movement founded at Yale under Timothy Dwight’s leadership and his “enterprising approach to religion” as the methodology that perpetuated it, in particular his strategy of unifying the Church in moral and social activism.<sup>48</sup> The proponents of the Second Awakening organized their efforts into missional action as “the churches provided elementary ‘disciplined formal organization,’ which created a society accustomed to working through voluntary association for common goals.”<sup>49</sup> In observation of the effects of the Awakening in England, Schlossberg points out that:

It was a feature of this particular religious renewal that for the most part it rejected the view that serious Christianity concerned only the individual, not the society. They were anything but individualists, a charge that has often been made. They banded together in huge numbers to form societies for helping the poor, evangelizing among an amazingly diverse array of groups, reforming morals, suppressing vice, improving the lot of prisoners, rescuing prostitutes from their economic distress and therefore their bondage, distributing religious literature, and promoting foreign missions.<sup>50</sup>

The Second Great Awakening also gave birth to a new style of evangelism that was perpetuated predominantly by Charles Finney, the “first great lay evangelist in America.”<sup>51</sup> Finney instituted what became known as the “new measures,” which were

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<sup>47</sup> McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, 75.

<sup>48</sup> Berk, *Calvinism versus Democracy*, xi.

<sup>49</sup> McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, 105.

<sup>50</sup> Schlossberg, “How Great Awakenings Happen,” 49.

<sup>51</sup> Berk, *Calvinism versus Democracy*, 179.

essentially new revivalist techniques.<sup>52</sup> The deep-seated thinking behind the revivalist techniques was Finney's conviction that human agency is just as indispensable to a revival as divine agency.<sup>53</sup> Since both divine and human agencies are needed, Finney argued that revivals will cease "whenever Christians get the idea that the work will go on without their aid," and also conversely whenever Christians overestimate their own role and strength and "do not feel their dependence on the Spirit."<sup>54</sup>

Although the two Great Awakenings were colored with unique expressions that mirrored the particular socio-historical contexts in which they were expressed, they also shared similarities that can be drawn upon as illustrative in identifying key precursors and underpinnings to present-day GCMs. These features include: thoughtful response processes to new secularizing forces, intentional leadership, Church unity, and social outcomes. The Great Awakenings also perpetuated a faith in revivalism that motivated future generations to anticipate and seek to generate new expressions of what had been experienced in the Great Awakenings. We cannot say whether North America will ever experience the profoundness, at a national level, that the Great Awakenings produced. One could argue that perhaps as America has become increasingly more heterogeneous it is unrealistic to anticipate a broad homogenous revitalization similar to what the Great Awakenings produced. However, what is not debatable is that varying levels of revivals continued to produce new movements in response to the changes in American society.

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<sup>52</sup> Berk, *Calvinism versus Democracy*, 179.

<sup>53</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, "The View of Man Inherent in New Measures Revivalism," *Church History* 45, Issue 2, (June, 1976), 206-221.

<sup>54</sup> Sweet, "The View of Man Inherent in New Measures Revivalism," 206-221.

## **North American Revivals and Movements**

The distinction between awakenings and revivals is subtle. For the sake of this study, we will borrow from McLoughlin's designation which highlights the culture-wide revitalizing nature of an awakening as opposed to the sectarian, localized qualities of revivals. Both awakenings and revivals are clearly movement producing phenomena, albeit revivals have a more limited scope. The revivals that are highlighted and the movements that they produced from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century provide useful precedence for how North American Evangelicals responded to the changing dynamics around them. Many of these examples find their genesis in the crucible of sociological shifts in America society, including an urbanization move from a predominantly rural agrarian society to industrial cities, and more recently, into an information age.

The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century North American revivals witnessed a fissure within Protestantism, where a rift was creating between those who prioritized either social or spiritual outcomes. While this chapter will later explore how Evangelicalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is seeking to reconcile these differences, it is important to point out that during these historical revivals traditional evangelicals became increasingly concerned with what they believed constituted "spiritual" matters. Within this purview, there are nevertheless certain shared characteristics that arose out of the revivals and movements from these eras, including their use of media and technique, a focus on laity, and their reactionary nature to sociological pressures.



## Urban Revivals of the Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century

The Great Prayer Revival began in 1857 in New York, and spread into many other U.S. cities. As observable in other historical revivals, The Great Prayer Revival exemplifies a dynamic interplay of divine and human agency. Frank Beardsley highlights four major outcomes of this revival:

1. Conversions: It is estimated that it resulted in 500,000 people coming to Christ in the United States over a span of two years.
2. Laity: Laypeople started and lead prayer meetings across cities and were mobilized into service.
3. Unity: In the midst of this refreshing work there was no room for sectarian strife and distrust.
4. Providential preparation for the impending Civil War: “It is interesting to raise the question how the nation could have passed through the dark and trying times of war had it not been preceded by the most extraordinary and widespread revival ever known on this continent.”<sup>55</sup>

Sizer believes the revival did also have a profound political influence: “The situation could only be rectified, from an evangelical perspective, by an inward purification which would lead to a reformation of morals and appropriate political action. The revival was their instrument for that task; the election of Lincoln could be seen as its fulfillment.”<sup>56</sup>

The belief that spiritual revival was needed for social and cultural impact carried on after the war in the Urban Revivals of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In a front-page news

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<sup>55</sup> Beardsley, *A History of American Revival*, 239.

<sup>56</sup> Sizer, “Politics and Apolitical Religion,” 91.

article, Brooklyn pastor Theodore L. Cuyler expressed a wish for renewal of the nation's spirit in all areas of life:

The revival, then, which we need is a revival of the religion which keeps God's commandments; which tells the truth and sticks to its promises; which cares more for a good character than a fine coat; which votes at the ballot-box in the same direction that it prays; which denies ungodly lusts and which can be trusted in every stress of temptation. A revival which will sweeten our homes and chasten our press and purify our politics and cleanse our business and commerce from roguery and rottenness would be a boon from Heaven. A revival which will bring not only a Bible-knowledge, but a Bible-conscience to all is what the land is dying for.<sup>57</sup>

However, over time this clarified connection between personal conversion and sanctification leading to social and cultural impact, began to wane. What was once a unified expression throughout the first two Great Awakenings appears to bifurcate in a more pronounced way after the Civil War into two disparate theological perspectives: (1) progressive social gospel proponents and (2) conservative conversionist evangelicals. The split became most acute in the Urban Revivals of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some more liberally slanted interpretations of these revivals believe they were established by captains of industry in the urban centers of America, to calm labor anxieties with a Christian message to “turn their attention to higher thoughts than labor agitation.”<sup>58</sup> McLoughlin explains that, “It is no coincidence that Moody was the first revivalist singled out by socialists as an enemy of the working class, a man who made religion ‘the opiate of the masses.’”<sup>59</sup> George Bernard Shaw said this of Moody’s revival in Dublin,

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<sup>57</sup> Sizer, “Politics and Apolitical Religion,” 94.

<sup>58</sup> McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakening, and Reform*, 142.

<sup>59</sup> McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakening, and Reform*, 142.

and Friedrich Engels called Moody and his proponents “the tools of the capitalist class.”<sup>60</sup> Sizer doesn’t see it quite so dramatically and polarizing. According to his view:

While the Moody revivals focused on individual salvation and personal morality, they were not intended to be devoid of import for the social situation. Moody's sermons and Sankey's songs emphasized the importance of the social bonds of home and family... Like the revivalists of the earlier part of the century, these evangelicals saw individual purification of sins as a way to cleanse the nation; but now the movement was still more intensely inward and one-by-one.<sup>61</sup>

Although the first two Awakenings employed new techniques to generate revival it is clear that these methods, particularly among the conversionists, began to take on a more professional nature. As FitzGerald describes:

Doubtless few preachers today consciously model themselves on Moody, yet Moody’s influence on twentieth-century evangelicalism goes far beyond his role in the development of fundamentalism. The professional way he organized his revivals informed all subsequent revivalists from Billy Sunday to Billy Graham, and his businesslike approach to evangelism continues in the practices of modern megachurches.<sup>62</sup>

### **The Emergence of the Social Gospel Movement**

The emergence of the social gospel movement precipitated as the growing needs of the changing urban manufacturing economy and the industrial age began producing a new kind of socio-economic reality. This reality fostered a mood in which a growing segment of intellectuals felt that revivalist professionalism and conversionists tactics were inadequate in meeting the desperate social needs of a changing North America. It was in this space that proponents of a new theology began to look at the underlying and

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<sup>60</sup> McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakening, and Reform*, 142.

<sup>61</sup> Sizer, “Politics and Apolitical Religion,” 95.

<sup>62</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals*, 84.

structural causes of poverty. Initial advocates for this new way of thinking were not theologians themselves per se, but were pastors like Washington Gladden who ministered in “a district burned over by Finneyite revivals.”<sup>63</sup> Reflecting on these historical shifts, Arthur Schlesinger advanced the thesis that during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, organized religion in North America faced two great challenges. The first challenge was to its system of thought (scientific thinking, especially the new biblical and historical studies), and the second challenge was to its social program (the results of technology). Schlesinger argued that the attempt on the part of certain energetic minorities within the churches to meet these challenges and to socialize church practices produced the Social Gospel Movement.<sup>64</sup>

The effect of the social gospel was to change the fundamental point of concern away from the individual (i.e., personal conversion and holiness) and focus instead on social issues mainly. This shift set in motion a trajectory that would divide Protestantism. The alterations brought about by the social gospel are elucidated by McLoughlin:

The new light of Liberal Protestantism turned the attention of the converted Christian not toward saving souls or perfecting his own inner holiness but toward efforts to raise the whole human race. The true Christian, as they understood it, attains fulfillment in the service of others. Ritschl taught that ‘moral goodness can be achieved only in society; the godly life is a social life, in which the individual fulfills his responsibilities to his fellow men.’ ... Any attempt to separate faith in God from public spirit and recognition of one’s duty to community is, from the Christian’s standpoint, a profound error.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals*, 60.

<sup>64</sup> Robert T. Handy, “Protestant Churches and Industrial America,” *The Journal of Religion*, no. 1, vol. 30 (1950): 67-69, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1198602>, accessed November 20, 2018.

<sup>65</sup> McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakening, and Reform*, 158.

Rather than fully addressing the sociological realities facing the industrial city, conservative revivalists, beginning with Moody, began to resist them. As McLoughlin again explains:

The best case that can be made for the significance of Moody's revivals of 1875–85 is that they represented a nativistic response to the rising cultural distortion that was building up to the 'new light' of the Social Gospel and Liberal Protestantism... The Social Gospel movement after 1890 took precisely the opposite tack; denouncing social and political injustice was, said its spokesmen, preeminently the task of the ministers and churches.<sup>66</sup>

Although they were a minority at the turn of the century, progressive theologians begin to go on the offensive by winning the intellectual argument in the seminaries and aligning with political, academic, and media elites. Liberal Christianity thus gained the formal upper hand so much so that historian Susan Harding believes that by 1926, after the loss of the Scopes trial, “the authorial voice of the country now seemed to belong to secularists and liberal Christians, and by its terms fundamentalists were cultural outsiders – people without a legitimate voice”<sup>67</sup> In response, revivalists like Billy Sunday confronted the Social Gospel Movement by preaching that “some people are trying to make a religion out of social service with Jesus Christ left out, we’ve had enough of this godless social service nonsense.”<sup>68</sup> The fissure between the new Social Gospel Movement and traditional evangelicals began to grow, creating a massive divide that still exists today between mainline Protestants and Evangelical Christians.

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<sup>66</sup> McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakening, and Reform*, 143-144.

<sup>67</sup> Susan F. Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 74.

<sup>68</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals*, 97.

Historian Henry May hypothesizes that the sociological phenomena of urbanization, industrialization and emigration, produced three major responses that in turn shaped three major branches of North American Christianity: (1) conservative social Christianity, (2) progressive social Christianity (i.e., the social gospel), and (3) radical social Christianity.<sup>69</sup> These increasing divides which were further accelerated into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, deeply impacting how churches related to one another. The level of splintering and subsequent alienation, not only spread between these three macro spheres of Protestantism, but also carried into hundreds of micro distinctions that began to develop in a consumeristic American Christianity in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The resulting fragmentation of Protestantism has produced a heterogeneous environment that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of capturing the broad homogenous impact of the First and Second Great Awakenings.

The divide between conservatives and liberals was not just theological, but also missiological, as a tension grew between the priorities of conversionist and social action outcomes. Bosch vividly describes the outworking of this divide: “The broad river of classical evangelicalism divided into a delta, with shallower streams emphasizing ecumenism and social renewal on the left and confessional orthodoxy and evangelism on the right. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the first had evolved into the Social Gospel and the second into Fundamentalism.”<sup>70</sup> It could be argued that the Social Gospel Movement was the major emphasis of the Ecumenical Movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>69</sup> Robert T. Handy, “Christianity and Socialism in America, 1900-1920,” *Church History* 21 (1) (1952): 39-54.

<sup>70</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 289.

The traditional and mainline churches began to form national entities called “councils” with the intent of unity around social action, which eventually gave way to the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948.<sup>71</sup> This Ecumenical Movement identified the synergy between unity and mission by espousing that “unity of action leads to the full unity of faith...In the eyes of the world cooperation among Christians becomes a form of common Christian witness and a means of evangelization which benefits all involved.”<sup>72</sup>

Lane Scruggs observes that although the concept of “ecumenism” and “evangelical” are viewed as mutually exclusive terms for most evangelicals, it is ironic since they initiated the practice in the mid-nineteenth century, even forming the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), pre-dating the WCC (World Council of Churches) by a hundred years.<sup>73</sup> Tennent captures the sentiments of many evangelicals when he characterizes the term ecumenical as an “attempt to find some grand, eternal, structural unity for the church.”<sup>74</sup> He proposes that the word should be re-captured in a “deeper ecumenism” that could “forge new kinds of unity that transcend denominational and confessional identities.”<sup>75</sup> This would intend towards forming “a deeper, spiritual unity that acknowledges our catholicity because we are all members of the body of Christ and

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<sup>71</sup> Jeffrey Gros, Eamon McManus, and Ann Riggs, *Introduction to Ecumenism* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998), 27.

<sup>72</sup> Gros, McManus, and Riggs, *Introduction to Ecumenism*, 87.

<sup>73</sup> Lane Scruggs, “Evangelicalism and Ecumenism: The World Evangelical Alliance and Church Unity,” *Fides Et Historia* (Spring 2017), 85-103.

<sup>74</sup> Tennent, *An Invitation to World Missions*, 439-453.

<sup>75</sup> Tennent, *An Invitation to World Missions*, 439-453.

share a common union with Jesus Christ and a burden to bear witness to Him in authentic ways.”<sup>76</sup>

One community that appears to have straddled the growing divide between liberals and conservatives was the African American Church, by maintaining a deep rooted evangelical orthodoxy but deeply committing themselves to the Social Gospel Movement, with most African American Churches joining the WCC.<sup>77</sup> In his thoughtful analysis, Clifford Green tracks the urban “great migration” of Southern Blacks beginning in the late 1890’s to the 1960’s into America’s cities, a social phenomenon perpetuated by the availability of manufacturing jobs and an attempt to escape the prejudice of rural communities.<sup>78</sup> This produced a divide between the minority, primarily ethnic and black populations of the poor “inner-city,” and the wealthier white suburbs. Green contends that this, “inescapably shapes the issue of how cities are to be understood and how churches can minister in them.”<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, Green also identifies an enthusiastic urban ministry environment perpetuated by the social justice and ecumenical movements that resulted in “increasing attention, staff, funding, and imagination (for urban ministry),” although the following decades saw a “decline of these efforts.”<sup>80</sup> Although the Social Gospel Movement found expression with a contingency of white evangelicals

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<sup>76</sup> Tennent, *An Invitation to World Missions*, 439-453.

<sup>77</sup> Clifford Green, ed. *Churches, Cities, and Human Community: Urban Ministry in the United States, 1945-1985* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 48.

<sup>78</sup> Green, *Churches, Cities, and Human Community*, 6-7.

<sup>79</sup> Green, *Churches, Cities, and Human Community*, 8.

<sup>80</sup> Green, *Churches, Cities, and Human Community*, 22.



that arose out of the social turbulence of the 1960's to form a progressive wing, the great majority according to Green, "turned their back on the cities and made their own 'great migration' in the phenomena known at the time as 'white flight.'" <sup>81</sup> Luder Whitlock observes that, "when liberal denominations set an agenda or took a position on a social issue, evangelicals were often immediately against it just because it was a liberal position." <sup>82</sup> Socialist Edward Glaeser agrees with this narrative by explaining that, "indeed, for many Americans, the latter half of the twentieth century – the end of the industrial age – was an education not in urban splendor but in urban squalor." <sup>83</sup>

### 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals

From a socio-historical perspective, the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a distinction from the earlier revival movements of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to Bernard Weisberger, "the 'modernization' of the revival went on to unrecognizability." <sup>84</sup> Beginning with Moody at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, evangelists begin to even further professionalize the craft beyond the populism of Whitefield in the First Awakening and Finney in the Second. It was Finney who provided the strong emphasis on man-made

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<sup>81</sup> Green, *Churches, Cities, and Human Community*, 7.

<sup>82</sup> Luder G. Whitlock Jr., *Divided We Fall: Overcoming a History of Christian Disunity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2017), loc. 2314, Kindle.

<sup>83</sup> Edward Glaeser, *Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2011), 2.

<sup>84</sup> Bernard A. Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River: The Story of the Great Revivalists and Their Impact upon Religion in America* (New York, NY: Octagon Books), 271.

means for bringing about repentance, which was then extended into applying mass media evangelism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This evangelical transition is explained by Bruce

Jevensen:

As the living link between the Great Awakening of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, Finney was a transitional figure in the growing nineteenth-century reliance on man-made means to spiritually excite the slothful. Where Edwards and Whitefield and their contemporaries would have expected God's lead in stirring the dry bones of indifferent congregations, Finney, from 1824 onward, preached the proper use of "all available means" in bringing men and women to repentance. For Moody that meant bringing a businessman's sense of organization and marketing to bear on Gilded Age audiences who otherwise might be unmoved by the gospel. That strategy made felicitous use of the mass media in promoting civic spectacles and citywide crusades that socially sanctioned his purposes in evangelism.<sup>85</sup>

The use of mass-evangelism "technique" that has become a defining element of 20<sup>th</sup> century evangelism and even cross-cultural missions, goes beyond strategy and effects theology. As Wiesberger points out, "Finney's generation opened the gates to human arrangement in the plan of salvation, and technique came in through the aperture. And technique was immortal whereas the day that bred the revival was not."<sup>86</sup> In other words, this individualization of the gospel, mixed with what may have been appropriate strategic methods to make the gospel more relevant for the realities of a particular time, became entrenched as doctrine for much of the Evangelical movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The technique and method remained, outliving the context in which it was originally birthed. According to Wiesberger, "a technique which is repeated when the original goal has been submerged is a ritual, indefinitely surviving change because it has no connection

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<sup>85</sup> Bruce Jensen, *God's Man for the Gilded Age: D.L. Moody and the Rise of Modern Mass Evangelism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 50.

<sup>86</sup> Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River*, 269.

with the shifting reality. The revival after Moody was a secular rite of the Protestant Evangelical Church.”<sup>87</sup> This form of evangelism, birthed in the Urban Revivals of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, theologically changed the trajectory of Evangelical missiology by championing individual conversionism over and against social and cultural outcomes.

Eric Crouse explains how this prevailing method of individual conversionism continued to be expressed by Evangelical missiology through the early parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

Earlier in the 19th century many evangelicals in the United States upheld social reform ideas in the fight against slavery, poverty and other social ills of the day. A more dogmatic application of evangelicalism was late 19th century conservative evangelicalism which devoted much energy to negative repudiation of Darwinism, higher criticism, and socialism and which can be said to have retreated from far reaching social reform ideas. The Conservative evangelicalism voiced at revival meetings was a blending of this illogical conservatism with a particular individualistic approach to social actions. Although there were some liberal evangelicals in America, it was unusual to find evangelists who were accepting of social reform ideals.<sup>88</sup>

The effect of Evangelicalism’s persistent and often exclusive bent toward individual conversion, coupled with an agonistic or antagonist mood toward social concern, was that Evangelicalism consequently became pushed to a progressively marginalized place in society. This in turn led to increasingly diminished voice in the culture.

Reflecting on how this trend took place, given the historical and sociological factors there were at play, Christian Smith writes:

Protestantism’s dominance of American public culture was increasingly giving way to a “neutral,” “rational” version of cultural discourse that left little room for the voice of religious authority. Furthermore, urbanization and industrialization

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<sup>87</sup> Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River*, 271.

<sup>88</sup> Eric Crouse, *Revival in the City: The Impact of American Evangelists in Canada, 1884-1914* (Canada: McGill-Queens University Press), 4.

were creating new, massive social problems that evangelical voluntary societies seemed increasingly unable to address and resolve.<sup>89</sup>

These socio-historical factors began to challenge the perceived relevancy of the gospel message. The message that worked for a more homogenous, rural, agrarian America was being challenged by the new changing realities. As Weisberger explains:

Concentration of industry, the rise of the city, inundations of immigration, materialistic philosophies and vanishing free lands stripped some of the reality from the old assumptions. The world was no longer an oyster, certain to be pried open by any man who labored hard and kept essential appetites firmly reined in. Righteousness was not a matter of obeying simple maxims of individual decency it was harder for religion to describe a way of life and duty that was realistic in society.<sup>90</sup>

Rather than seeking a dialectical approach to the changing realities of urban life, Protestant North America fell prey to a dualistic approach between faith and good works, which still persists today.

### **Fundamentalism, Liberalism, and Pentecostalism**

While these sociological shifts in the American landscape promoted splintering within American Protestantism, the schism was further amplified by conservatives who increasingly began to define themselves in terms of what they were against. These inclinations gave way to Fundamentalism, where evangelicals began to identify themselves by way of differentiation from society at large and the rest of Christendom, be it Catholic, liberal, and even other factions within the evangelical community. Whether

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<sup>89</sup> Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 5.

<sup>90</sup> Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River*, 270.

conscientiously or not, fundamentalists thus began emulating a way of thinking that has been described as “scapegoating.” This philosophy holds that certain groups are often held together by having someone to hate, someone to be against.<sup>91</sup> Scapegoating was evident in the preaching of Billy Sunday and other revivalists in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which helped give rise to, and outline the contours of the Fundamentalist Movement. As Richard Hart recounts, “Beginning in 1918, (the Fundamentalists) went from more or less peaceful coexistence with the liberals in their denominations to organized efforts to drive modernism out of the churches and schools.”<sup>92</sup> The modernists countered antagonistically with a belief that “the source of evil lay in the intense preoccupation of Protestant evangelicalism with soul-winning and revivalism.”<sup>93</sup>

The impact of the First World War, the Great Depression and the fragmentation in American Christianity appears to have had a negative impact on America’s faith in religion. As Fitzgerald reflects, “church attendance dropped off sharply in the major northern denominations, and the tent revivalists lost their congregations. Billy Sunday held his last crusade in 1930, and those who hoped to succeed him were largely ignored.”<sup>94</sup> Eric Swanson described this time as a period where the “historic mandates of love and mercy that had been coupled with gospel proclamation were abandoned in favor

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<sup>91</sup> Richard J. Hart, *How Christian Are You?* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2009), 71.

<sup>92</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals*, 112.

<sup>93</sup> McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakening, and Reform*, loc. 3069, Kindle.

<sup>94</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals*, 144.

of an exclusively verbal message addressing individual salvation.”<sup>95</sup> Thus by the 1920’s the “great reversal” had taken place, and “Evangelicals’ interest in social concerns had been obliterated.”<sup>96</sup>

Concurrent with this era was the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, which was neither “liberal” nor “fundamentalist” per se, but would nonetheless grow to have enormous impact in the U.S. and throughout the world. The Azusa Street Revival gave birth to the Pentecostal movement, which grew so fast that by 1979, 19% of all Americans considered themselves Pentecostal or Charismatic.<sup>97</sup> Born out of “poor inner-city, racially integrated, Holiness circles,”<sup>98</sup> the revival immediately caught the attention of the main-stream media appearing on the front-page of the Los Angeles Times.<sup>99</sup> Instead of shrinking away from the attention, William Seymour, the leader of the revival, began to publish and widely distribute his accounts of what God was doing. The movement grew so quickly that the involvement and participation of the laity became critical from a practical standpoint, and was also encouraged theologically.<sup>100</sup>

Peter Wagner proposes that,

Martin Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers had an important soteriological function in the churches of the Reformation, but he did not clearly

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<sup>95</sup> Eric Swanson and Sam Williams, *To Transform a City: Whole Church, Whole Gospel, Whole City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 96-97.

<sup>96</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 318.

<sup>97</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals*, 224.

<sup>98</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals*, 242.

<sup>99</sup> Tennent, *An Invitation to World Missions*, loc. 4754, Kindle.

<sup>100</sup> Tennent, *An Invitation to World Missions*, loc. 4754, Kindle.

see the pneumatological implications. In fact it was only with the advent of the Pentecostal movement that a practical application of Luther's doctrine can begin to be made for the ministry.<sup>101</sup>

It was the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that brought a revival of exercising spiritual gifts to the Christian Church in every denomination around the world. Spiritual gifts became an essential category for practicing of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.<sup>102</sup> Additionally, although Pentecostals remained disengaged from political and social movements, their missiology was deeply ingrained in ministry to the poor at a local and personal level. Instead of seeking to reform social structures or challenge government policies, Pentecostals attempted to build from the ground up an alternative social reality.<sup>103</sup>

The revival movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whether products of the Social Gospel, Pentecostalism or Fundamentalism, either entrenched themselves into existing church structures that accepted their distinct values, or begin to form their own that quickly spawned into a multiplicity of new denominations which in turn gave rise to a phase of institutionalized American Christianity. Russel Richey observes that this was a time of consolidation where the Church was responding to “corporate organization that derives its agendas from the socio-economic-cultural-political-military expansionism that swept the United States and Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

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<sup>101</sup> Ma Wonsuk and Robert P. Menzie, *Pentecostalism in Context: Essays in Honor of William W. Menzies* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 189.

<sup>102</sup> Wonsuk and Menzie, *Pentecostalism in Context*, 190.

<sup>103</sup> Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (London, England: University of California Press, 2007), 4.

centuries.”<sup>104</sup> The denomination, then, can be thought of as an ecclesial creature of modernity, a social form emerging with and closely akin to the political party, the free press, and free enterprise.<sup>105</sup> Religious researcher, Robert Wuthnow, argues that denominationalism is “one of the essential features of American religion.”<sup>106</sup> This period of consolidation took place through the period of the Great Depression and World War II.

After WWII, there was a noticeable upswing in faith:

According to all surveys, not just the number but also the percentage of Americans who attended church increased dramatically. By one estimate the percentage of the population with a church affiliation rose from 43 percent before the war to 55 percent in 1950 to 69 percent in 1960. Every major Protestant denomination gained large numbers of new adherents, and membership in some of the small denominations multiplied several times over.<sup>107</sup>

This increase in faith was also accompanied by an adaptation of religious forms, which was experienced broadly by Protestants, Catholics, and even Jews. As McLoughlin explains:

The awakening entered all three faiths in a new concern over direct personal encounters with God’s Spirit. Jews experienced it in the revival of orthodoxy and in a rising interest in Hasidism. Catholics experienced it in the charismatic movement, Protestants in the rising interest in Pentecostalism. Underlying these pietistic movements in all three faiths was a loss of faith in the old forms, doctrines, and rituals and a feeling that those whose duty it was to explain God’s will in their daily lives were incapable of doing so.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Russell E. Richey, “Denominations and Denominationalism: Past, Present, and Future.” *Word & World* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2005), 19.

<sup>105</sup> Richey, “Denominations and Denominationalism, 17.

<sup>106</sup> Mark S. Hanson, *The Future of Denominations: Asking Uppercase Questions*, *Word & World* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2005), 7.

<sup>107</sup> FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals*, 146.

<sup>108</sup> McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakening, and Reform*, 192.



At the center of the resurgence was the evangelist Billy Graham. No American revivalist before or since has achieved the success that Billy Graham did in the middle years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His fundamentalist roots and media savvy are often cited as his secrets to galvanizing city-wide campaigns that unified across a wide swath of the Christian community. However, Graham also tapped into a neo-evangelicalism that was emerging from the battle between conservative Fundamentalism and Liberalism. As Bosch points out, “Karl Barth, with his ‘theology of crisis’ was the first to break fundamentally with the liberal theological tradition and inaugurate a new theological paradigm.”<sup>109</sup> He proposed that it was “foolish of Liberalism to neglect the ultimate facts of the human condition – the innate depravity of human nature and the mystery of God’s will.”<sup>110</sup>

In this moment of dissonance Graham presented a message that was grounded in tradition but spoke to relevant issues. Namely, “Graham was introduced to his radio audience each week as ‘a man with God’s message for these crisis times’; and while he devoted most of his sermon messages to the need for each man and woman to make an ‘immediate decision for Christ,’ he usually started his talks with references to current social and political issues.”<sup>111</sup> His focused cross-denominational, church-sponsored, and city-wide crusades lasted for five to six weeks at a time and drew 300 to 6000 people.<sup>112</sup> However, Billy Graham would be attacked by both the Liberals and the Fundamentalists.

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<sup>109</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 340.

<sup>110</sup> McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakening, and Reform*, 181.

<sup>111</sup> McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakening, and Reform*, 189.

<sup>112</sup> FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals*, 176.

Neibuhr was highly critical of Billy Graham's ministry:

It would be interesting to know how many of those attracted by his evangelistic Christianity are attracted by the obvious fact that his new evangelism is much blander than the old. For it promises a new life, not through painful religious experience but merely by signing a decision card. Thus a miracle of regeneration is promised at a painless price by an obviously sincere evangelist. It is a bargain. He reduces faith to a simple panacea for all the ills of the world and all the problems of life by asking bad people to become good and to prove it by loving one another.<sup>113</sup>

Fundamentalists also began to oppose him. John Rice said, "Dr. Graham is one of the spokesmen and perhaps the principal spark plug of a great drift away from strict Bible fundamentalism and strict defense of the faith."<sup>114</sup> Although fundamentalists would eventually lose the battle to control the center of evangelical Christianity, they continued to grow: "they had lost the battle for prestige, but they did not lose their sizable constituencies."<sup>115</sup> Graham, on the other hand, contended that the real reason revival had not come to America was "the name-calling and mud-slinging among Evangelicals."<sup>116</sup>

### **Recent Theological and Practical Underpinnings of GCMs**

In the midst of this growing tension in North American Protestantism, new voices began to emerge and call for a more thoughtful approach to the cultural challenges that were being faced in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In his contemporary preface to Carl

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<sup>113</sup> Mark Silk, *Spiritual Politics: Religion and America Since World War II* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1988), 101.

<sup>114</sup> FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals*, 192.

<sup>115</sup> FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals*, 147.

<sup>116</sup> FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals*, 192.

Henry's classic book *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, Richard Mouw observes that:

Carl F. H. Henry and others who would soon come to be known as the leaders of a 'neo-evangelicalism' were deeply concerned that those Christians known as 'fundamentalists' or 'evangelicals' – the terms were interchangeable at the time – were ill-equipped to address the crucial issues of the day.<sup>117</sup>

Henry proposed that “supernaturalistic” or spiritual outcomes were not antithetical to social outcomes, arguing that “I voice my concern because we have not applied the genius of our position constructively to those problems which press most for solution in a social way.”<sup>118</sup> His thesis was that a fundamentalist brand of evangelicalism was producing an isolationism that was in turn creating and unproductive perception of revivalism as being disconnected from the needs of modern humanity. Henry thus contended that “modern prejudice, justly or unjustly, had come to identify fundamentalism largely in terms of an anti-ecumenical spirit of independent isolationism, an uncritically-held set of theological formulas, an overly-emotional type of revivalism.”<sup>119</sup> The thinking of Carl Henry and those of his contemporaries in the neo-evangelical space, provided a theological perspective and vision that formed the foundational underpinnings of GCMs today.

It was in the context of urban ministry where these perspectives found the most fertile reception. Ray Bakke, describing the genesis of his thinking about urban ministry,

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<sup>117</sup> Carl Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 1947, Reprint (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003 reprint), ix-x.

<sup>118</sup> Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, xvii.

<sup>119</sup> Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 5.

found that as a pastor in Chicago he was unprepared for the despair and hopelessness of his people. In the mid-sixties, Bakke expressed that “for the first time in my life I saw what an urban church and its pastor could be and do if they combined biblical and theological integrity with contextual engagement of the issues of the day.”<sup>120</sup> Upon reflection, Bakke identified what he called an “anti-urban” bias in conservative Christians, which he said were “skewed in an anti-city direction.”<sup>121</sup> Conn and Ortiz believe such a perspective has been propagated by “a growing Christian dualism that looked for individual converts in the city but turned against the city as a perversion of nature.”<sup>122</sup> Additionally, Van Engen has observed that conservatives focused on the city “as a place of crisis, an erosion of values, of the segmentation of a personal life.”<sup>123</sup>

Within this context, a renewed Christian concern for the city begin to emerge out of the cultural challenges of the 1950’s and 1960’s. These concerns arose out of two primary developments: (1) the reality of the growing economically challenged urban black, minority, and ethnic communities that filled the cities looking for opportunity, coupled with (2) America’s white flight from the urban center to suburban captivity. Van Engen details how the Social Gospel Movement and more liberally bent denominations placed a priority on urban ministry, and between 1962 and 1975 established 27 action

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<sup>120</sup> Ray Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), loc. 133, Kindle.

<sup>121</sup> Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City*, loc. 165.

<sup>122</sup> Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City, and the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), loc. 654, Kindle.

<sup>123</sup> Charles Van Engen and Jude Tiersma (eds.), *God so Loves the City: Seeking a Theology of Urban Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf Stock Publishers, 1994), iii.

training centers in 22 large U.S. cities to help the church cope with urban social issues. He also details three main reasons as to why the prevailing white Evangelical sentiment during this same time period moved in the opposite direction, away from the city. According to Van Engen, these reasons include: (1) A rejection of social political upheaval, (2) A rejection of mainline churches “liberal” reactionary agenda, and (3) A predominately pietistic emphasis on traditional conversionist evangelism. He postulates that these combined reasons moved the Evangelical church planting attention heavily towards the suburbs.<sup>124</sup> This rationale aligns with Conn and Ortiz’s general thesis that as cities grow, the percentage of urban Christians tends to decrease.<sup>125</sup> These authors contend that when we look at the state of Christianity in the West we can attribute its decline to the loss of Christianity in the city: “nominalism and decline are prevailing, and the Church faces not a pre-Christian urban world but a post-Christian one.”<sup>126</sup>

The challenges of the city have always pushed the Church towards ecumenical ministry. As Van Engen states, “it is after all what one would expect when contextualization issues are taken seriously in a setting as complex and challenging as the city.”<sup>127</sup> He postulates that the global city may provide the one single element to usher in David Bosch’s prediction of an emerging ecumenical paradigm shift in the theology of mission for our day.<sup>128</sup> The integrating network of the city has also pressured for a

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<sup>124</sup> Van Engen and Tiersma, *God so Loves the City*, iii.

<sup>125</sup> Conn and Ortiz, *Urban Ministry*, 76.

<sup>126</sup> Conn and Ortiz, *Urban Ministry*, 76.

<sup>127</sup> Van Engen and Tiersma, *God so Loves the City*, v.

<sup>128</sup> Van Engen and Tiersma, *God so Loves the City*, v.

networking counterpart in the Church. Conn and Ortiz point out that this is nothing new, since common approaches that deal with urban challenges first appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as examples of this trend.<sup>129</sup> Bishop David Sheppard expresses it this way: “When you live in an industrial city where barely 4% of the population takes the gospel seriously and goes to church, you cannot but try to find a way to work together without dividing the forces of that small flock.”<sup>130</sup>

According to many urban missiologists, including Samuel Escobar, Bakke has “contributed more than anyone else to raising urban awareness.”<sup>131</sup> Significant themes emerge from his scholarship and practical ministry that are formational to present GCM expressions. These focal commitments include: a commitment to spiritual transformation of persons and social transformation of place, a commitment of unity that helps local congregations define their identity and security in the church universal, and to love neighbors in witness and service.<sup>132</sup> These foundational expressions of Bakke are similar to Tim Keller’s more contemporary vision of urban mission. Keller presents his framework in a theological vision that encompasses three central elements:

- (1) Gospel: As a central common evangelical orthodoxy that does not tend toward either law or license.

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<sup>129</sup> Conn and Ortiz, *Urban Ministry*, 76.

<sup>130</sup> Conn and Ortiz, *Urban Ministry*, 238.

<sup>131</sup> Samuel Escobar, “From Lausanne 1974 to Manilla 1989: The Pilgrimage of Urban Mission,” *Urban Mission* 7 no. 4, (1990): 24.

<sup>132</sup> Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City*, loc. 1928.

- (2) City: A balanced contextual cultural approach to present urban realities that neither over or under adapt the Gospel to its context.
- (3) Movement: A commitment to work in common cause to reach a city or work for the common good without relinquishing individual church traditions or doctrine.<sup>133</sup>

These three central elements can be seen in Keller's descriptive summary of the composition and goals of GCMs:

Christians and churches coming together across racial and denominational lines in a city, unified by the gospel and a vision to reach that city – which means to see the urban body of Christ grow in quality and quantity faster than the population, so that the salt and light of Christian love and truth will influence the life of that city; renewing it, improving it socially, influencing it culturally, and lifting up Jesus' name so it's increasingly respected and honored in that city.<sup>134</sup>

Both Bakke and Keller's perspectives arise out of their shared contexts in facing the social upheavals of the 1960's and 1970's. During this era, Keller was ministering on a university campus in the midst of Vietnam protest, and was seeking ways of engaging students in a relevant and dynamic way. Bakke, as a young church planter in Chicago, faced social issues that his traditional Evangelical upbringing could not address. As he recounts, "nothing prepared me for the cultural captivity and failure of my church under pressure."<sup>135</sup> These two pioneers and thought leaders of the present-day GCM

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<sup>133</sup> Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 24.

<sup>134</sup> Leonardo Blair, "Tim Keller Warns Christians About Being Divided by Politics: 'You're Christian First,'" *The Christian Post*, 2016, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/tim-keller-warns-christians-about-being-divided-by-politics-youre-christian-first-171157/>, accessed November 20, 2018.

<sup>135</sup> Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City*, loc. 134.

phenomena epitomize the emerging spirit of an Evangelical community seeking to reconcile the long standing fissure that divided the Protestant American church beginning in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and pitted progressive Social Gospel proponents and conservative conversionist evangelicals against each other. These forerunners also echo Carl Henry's "uneasy conscience" of a fundamentalism ill-equipped to deal with the social challenges and complexity of the city. In his book, *Divided We Fall: Overcoming a History of Disunity*, Luder G. Whitlock applies this principle to the present day context, noting that:

Perhaps, in this twenty-first century, the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy and the conflict with liberal theology are sufficiently distant for evangelicals to develop an uneasy conscience about our lack of unity. Our consciences should be troubled as we survey the mess we have made of the church. We have wounded one another and limited our effectiveness as a witness to the unbelieving world.<sup>136</sup>

### **Major Emerging Characteristics of GCMs**

There have been many expressions of city relatedness in U.S. evangelical churches that have centered on evangelistic events, prayer initiatives, pastoral networks, and other common activities. However, a new intentionality of organizing sustainable partnership and collaboration by local church leaders for joint missional expression in their cities appears to be a strong emerging trend. Multiple responses have transpired out of Keller and Bakke's foundational thinking and praxis that are evident in present-day expressions of GCMs.

The Luis Palau organization has identified over 250 GCMs currently operating in the U.S. While each of these GCMs has a unique story and thumbprint, nevertheless

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<sup>136</sup> Whitlock, *Divided We Fall*, xv.



there are major discernable characteristics that seem to make up the common core of all GCMs. These shared characteristics include: (1) local orientation, (2) Church unity, (3) missional collaboration, and (4) the empowerment of the laity.

### *Local Orientation*

Local orientation stands out as a central characteristic of GCMs for two primary reasons: (1) the uniqueness of major cities, and (2) recent dramatic shifts in North American ecclesiology.

#### The Uniqueness of Major Cities

The importance of recognizing the distinct individuality of cities is a core practice of the Church's missionary enterprise, which can be traced back to the earliest expressions of New Testament missiology. However, given the rapid increase of urbanization in our contemporary global era, the need to appreciate the uniqueness of cities becomes even more pressing. To this point, Bakke advocates for a modern recovery and reemphasis of Pauline urban missiology by noting that, "It seems very significant to an urban minister like me that Paul never approached a city the same way twice. He custom-made his approach."<sup>137</sup> As a missiological thought leader, Newbigin also identifies the city as a "key characteristic" that requires a unique missiological approach.<sup>138</sup> Accordingly, Bell and De-Shalit also contend that the need to understand

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<sup>137</sup> Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City*, loc. 1452.

<sup>138</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 2.

the identity of a city matters even more in a global age, because “the desire to experience a sense of uniqueness and particularity seems deeply rooted in human nature, and with the decline of national attachments, the best place to look for a supplement might be ‘down’ to the city rather than ‘up’ to the world.”<sup>139</sup>

Jacques Ellul echoes this thought by affirming that cities take on distinct attributes of meaning as humanity stamps a kind of individuality on the cities they build. Cities are not therefore “just a collection of houses...but also a spiritual power” with spiritual influence that is “capable of directing and changing a man’s spiritual life.”<sup>140</sup> The distinct “spirit” of a city goes beyond just a choice between a rural or urban life. Urban dwellers take specific pride not only in the fact that they live in an urban environment with broad characteristics that make urban life desirable as compared to rural life, but also in the particular reality that they live in a city environment that is uniquely relative to other cities. This special pride is called “civicism,” because it is rooted in the feeling that one’s city possesses a local particularity that establishes a distinctive kind of identity. Civicism is thus an expression of how urban dwellers identify with the local uniqueness of their cities. As Bell and De-Shalit express, “it’s hard to feel proud of a city that only expresses the homogeneity of globalization, just as it’s hard to feel proud of a neighborhood McDonald’s.”<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Daniel A. Bell and Avner de-Shalit, *The Spirit of Cities: Why the Identity of a City Matters in a Global Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), xi.

<sup>140</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 1970, Reprint, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 9.

<sup>141</sup> Bell and de-Shalit, *The Spirit of Cities*, xii.

Contemporary cities are also distinguished by certain emerging features, such as creativity, knowledge, and rapid change. As a thought leader who has written extensively on the nature of 21<sup>st</sup> century cities, Richard Florida has argued that a new creative social class has transpired. Florida explains that, “while the explosive growth of many cities in the nineteenth century was tied to the gains of the Industrial Revolution, today’s rapid and global urbanization is tied to a new currency: creativity. Our world is no longer animated by the manufacturing of goods; it is now propelled by ideas.”<sup>142</sup> Constantly recurring change also animates modern cities. In times of extreme change local affinity groups are critical in fulfilling the natural “cravings for psychological security and identification” because they provide an “ability to develop a coherent sense of the outside world” by tying people together in “interpersonal relations in which values became meaningful.”<sup>143</sup> These sociological features further add to a heterogeneous affect that requires the Church in every city to develop a localized response relevant to its context.

The realities of particularity and locality in cities requires the Church to increasingly orient their response in a contextualized ways. Bakke references this as a “bottom-up” approach from the Church, which seeks to engage their city in a way that is contextual, personal, and transformative. For Bakke, “the bigger the city and the more urbanized we get, the more intentionally personal and local our witness must become.”<sup>144</sup> To this point, Keller also maintains that the “place” of the city is the highest missional

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<sup>142</sup> Bell and de-Shalit, *The Spirit of Cities*, 48.

<sup>143</sup> Whitlock, *Divided We Fall*, loc. 1480.

<sup>144</sup> Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City*, loc. 1263.

priority of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>145</sup> Keller also describes the inadequacy many prevailing ministry methods that are “forged outside of urban areas and then simply imported with little thought given to the unnecessary barriers this practice erects between urban dwellers and the Gospel.”<sup>146</sup> Recognizing the uniqueness of cities requires a heightened local orientation of the Church, so that, “just as the Bible needs to be translated into its readers’ vernacular, so the gospel needs to be embodied and communicated in ways that are understandable to the residents of a city.”<sup>147</sup>

A commitment to understanding the unique particularities of a city seems to be a prescient reason why church communities are forming GCMs in hopes of developing cohesive responses to the unique characteristics of their city. In tracking with historical urban ministry, Currie observes that “particular kinds of cities accompanied particular kinds of church movements” and “new approaches to urban life paralleled new approaches to church life.”<sup>148</sup> Keller has also concurred that, “urban ministers today must learn how to exegete their neighborhoods to grasp their sociological complexity. They are obsessed with studying and learning about their local communities.”<sup>149</sup> Local orientation is thus recognized as a major feature of present GCMs, as it is expressed in two of the four “core attributes” of GCMs that are described on the “City Gospel

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<sup>145</sup> Tim Keller, *Loving the City: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 151.

<sup>146</sup> Keller, *Loving the City*, 161.

<sup>147</sup> Keller, *Loving the City*, 161.

<sup>148</sup> Currie, “Ecclesiapolis,” in *Reaching for the New Jerusalem*, 39.

<sup>149</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 174.

Movements” website.<sup>150</sup> For example, the attribute of “church-driven” is expressed as the “empowering of a *local* Church to accomplish its mission as the people of God in the *city*.”<sup>151</sup> Additionally, the attribute of “city-focused” is described as “collaborate with *city* leaders to discern the *city*’s needs and work to meet them.”<sup>152</sup>

The emphasis on local orientation is not only highlighted by stated objectives, but is also echoed by eminent GCM leaders. Several GCM forerunners have repeatedly stressed the exercise of discerning the sociological contours of one’s city. As a pioneer in helping cities build gospel movements, Eric Swanson has counseled that “you must become an expert on your city through an exegesis of your city.”<sup>153</sup> Swanson also teaches GCM leaders how to do quantitative and qualitative research on their cities.<sup>154</sup> In order to help leaders acquire greater cultural fluency of their cities, Glenn Smith, Executive Director of Christian Direction in Montreal,<sup>155</sup> also developed a 20-step

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<sup>150</sup> City Gospel Movements, “What are the characteristics of a City Gospel Movement?” 2018, <https://citygospelmovements.org/trending-questions/#CharCGM>, accessed September 21, 2018.

<sup>151</sup> City Gospel Movements, “What are the Characteristics of a City Gospel Movement?” <https://citygospelmovements.org/trending-questions/#CharCGM>, accessed September 21, 2018.

<sup>152</sup> City Gospel Movements, “What are the Characteristics of a City Gospel Movement?” <https://citygospelmovements.org/trending-questions/#CharCGM>, accessed September 21, 2018.

<sup>153</sup> Swanson, *To Transform a City*, 157.

<sup>154</sup> Swanson, *To Transform a City*, 157.

<sup>155</sup> This ministry was established in 1983 with a commitment to see God transform the urban communities by the concerted actions of committed Christians in the cities of the Francophone world.

process to exegete neighborhoods.<sup>156</sup> Keller also encourages gospel practitioners to use the tools of social science such as urban ethnography, demographics, and urban planning, to find ways of strengthening neighborhoods in obedience to biblical mandate to “seek the welfare of the city” (Jer 29:7).<sup>157</sup>

Dave Runyon and Jay Pathak, co-founders of City Unite, a Denver GCM, have modeled this core feature of local orientation. These GCM leaders argue that the most practical plan to solving a city’s problems, and to enable cities to become the places God intended them to be – is to catalyze a neighboring movement.<sup>158</sup> Pathak and Runyon go on to explain that, “the first step to taking the Great Commandment literally is to move from stranger to acquaintance in your relationships with those that live nearest to you.”<sup>159</sup> This intensely localized approach is also endorsed by Ken Blanchard, who states that, “building relationships with our neighbors leads to better communities, better cities, and ultimately... a better world.”<sup>160</sup> Accordingly, Bakke has also proposed that “mission is no longer about crossing oceans, jungles and deserts, but about crossing the streets of the world’s cities. Cities are far too complex a matrix to yield to ministry from a safe

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<sup>156</sup> Glenn Smith, “Urban Ministry: How to Exegete a Neighborhood,” Church For Vancouver, 2018, <https://churchforvancouver.ca/urban-ministry-how-to-exegete-a-neighbourhood/>, accessed September 21, 2018.

<sup>157</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 175.

<sup>158</sup> Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring: Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 25.

<sup>159</sup> Pathak and Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring*, 25.

<sup>160</sup> Pathak and Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring*, Back Cover.

distance through media...nearly all urban persons come to Christ through relationships...the bigger the city, the higher this percentage seems to be.”<sup>161</sup>

The uniqueness of cities, especially in their present-day socio-cultural realities, has accentuated the need for a contextualized urban response by the Church. This is one primary reason why local orientation stands out as a central characteristic of contemporary GCMs. Another catalyst driving local orientation by GCMs is a rapidly changing ecclesiology.

### Shifts in North American Ecclesiology

North American ecclesiology has been undergoing significant shifts toward post-denominationalism, making both the proliferation of GCMs themselves more feasible and further driving their orientation toward local engagement within their cities. These new ecclesial forms have been driven by important social underpinnings. Paul Ballard describes post-denominationalism as a “phenomenon which has been radically boosted, sociologically, by the increased social mobility and changes that have brought forth the consumerist society.”<sup>162</sup> Urbanization has also highlighted the primacy of the city, which has in turn shaped the adapting forms of the Church. In his early thinking, Bakke identified the need to subordinate denominational forms to the local realities the church was facing: “the challenge is ecclesiastical, for every church and denomination will face the reality that while the church may keep the same basic functions (worship, evangelism,

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<sup>161</sup> Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City*, loc. 220-230.

<sup>162</sup> Paul Ballard, “Requiem for Ecumenism? Some Personal Reflections.” *Expository Times* 120 (5), (2009): 225-230.

fellowship and service), the forms they take must adapt to the pluralized and kaleidoscopic realities of a 24-hour city.”<sup>163</sup> Clifford Green also agrees that, “the denominational form of the church is simply not congruent with the modern metropolis, including the issues of urban life.”<sup>164</sup> Furthermore, “denominations are the legacy of confessional struggles and other factors; they were never intended to be structures of metropolitan ministry.”<sup>165</sup> Within post-denominationalism we are thus seeing “glimpses of the shape of the Church to come, where divisions can be worked through in practice and a new enriched and fuller expression of the gospel can be expressed.”<sup>166</sup> Locally engaged GCMs are a manifest expression of the Church in post-denominationalism.

In addition to the surrounding social conditions of post-denominationalism, there are also identifiable ecclesiastical features that help explain the priority of locally oriented GCMs. Ballard identifies that a rising post-denominationalism is producing “a more pragmatic approach to unity, arising from the necessity of Christian witness, moving from the bottom up.”<sup>167</sup> In his in-depth research on North American Evangelicalism, Christian Smith identifies two more distinct features of evangelicalism’s organizational structure and culture. First, its ability to produce entrepreneurial leaders. Second, its ability to “successfully incorporate a rich variety of Christian traditions and

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<sup>163</sup> Green, *Churches, Cities, and Human Community*, loc. 69.

<sup>164</sup> Green, *Churches, Cities, and Human Community*, 298.

<sup>165</sup> Green, *Churches, Cities, and Human Community*, 298.

<sup>166</sup> Ballard, “Requiem for Ecumenism? Some Personal Reflections,” 225-230.

<sup>167</sup> Ballard, “Requiem for Ecumenism? Some Personal Reflections,” 225-230.



positions into a common identity-movement without relying on geographical, organizational centralization or uniformity to do so.”<sup>168</sup> This pragmatic approach and entrepreneurial ethos seem to be key factors in promoting GCMs ability to attract church leaders from across the movement into localized ecclesiological structures.

Broad doctrinal alignment around the essentials of the faith is another significant and growing feature of the Church in post-denominationalism, which is fueling the propagation of locally engaged GCMs. J. I. Packer and Thomas C. Oden have reflected that:

By 2000 what might be called a New Ecumenism was emerging, re-grounded in classic Christianity and drawing together the biblically orthodox from pre-Reformation, Reformation, and post-Reformation traditions. All these efforts point a way to possible closer consolidation and cooperation, uncompromising and within recognized limits, between conservative Christian constituencies.<sup>169</sup>

Within post-denominationalism, Oden and Packer maintain that there is a “shared view of the Bible and the atonement, of faith and life in Christ, and of the church’s life and mission.”<sup>170</sup> These broad doctrinal affirmations “hold them tightly together, more tightly than used to be the case when denominational walls were higher.”<sup>171</sup> As a theological shepherd of GCMs, Keller understands these dynamics well, maintaining that theology must always be a foundation for our ecumenism. Keller stresses the need for a firm “theological vision” as a principal basis for collaboration in GCMs, defining it as a

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<sup>168</sup> Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 85.

<sup>169</sup> J.I. Packer and Thomas C. Oden. *One Faith: The Evangelical Consensus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 24.

<sup>170</sup> Packer and Oden, *One Faith*, 161.

<sup>171</sup> Packer and Oden, *One Faith*, 161.

“vision for what you are going to do with your doctrine in a particular time and space.”<sup>172</sup>

In post-denominationalism, the list of doctrinal topics necessary for theological consensus has been shortened and re-centered around biblical essentials. This growing propensity toward a more widespread doctrinal alignment around central truths of the faith helps to explain the growth of GCMs that are responding to local needs over and above classic denominational distinctives, priorities, and practices.

The post-denominational shifts of evangelicalism have given rise to adapted forms of the Church, which help explain the characteristic of local orientation that that GCMs provide as a missional platform to serve the needs of the Church and the city. Evangelicalism today can thus be understood as “less of an organization than a vast, loose network of small denominations, denominational and nondenominational congregations (about 20 percent of North American evangelicals belong to nondenominational church congregations), parachurch ministries, mission’s agencies, and educational institutions.”<sup>173</sup> Consequently, the evangelical landscape of today is “structurally wide open for innovative leaders to emerge and launch new initiatives.”<sup>174</sup>

Socio-cultural and ecclesiastical shifts, in an age of urbanization and globalization, have fostered a desire for cities to form a local identity that reflects the unique spirit of their cities. The uniqueness of major cities, combined with shifts in North American ecclesiology, are two influential dynamics that account for the emergence of GCMs that are principally concerned with local orientation. The premise

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<sup>172</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 18.

<sup>173</sup> Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 85.

<sup>174</sup> Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 85.

of GCMs is largely built around the proposition that the distinct nature of a city calls on the Church in that city to find commonality in their response. This common characteristic of GCMs naturally folds into a second core feature of GCMs, which is local church unity.

### *Church Unity*

A plea for church unity is at the heart of GCMs core identity and mission. GCM leader Mac Pier believes that, “what our cities need more than anything is a maturing and deepening of relationship between diverse Christian leaders within the city. Missional unity is the ball game.”<sup>175</sup> The nature of church unity can be clarified by probing questions that shape one’s biblical and theological perspective of the city. For example, “when we make decisions, are we considering how those decisions will affect the entire body of Christ, which is one body according to Scripture? Are we truly aware that the church is a living body as the Bible teaches? Or do we think of our church as just the folks who show up on Sundays in one particular place?”<sup>176</sup> As a GCM coach, Eric Swanson states that “wherever we go and speak to city leaders who are interested in the transformation of their city, we begin our time by sharing a phrase adopted from the Lausanne movement. We say that transformation can only occur when ‘the whole church

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<sup>175</sup> Mac Pier, *A Disruptive Gospel: Stories and Strategies for Transforming Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 53.

<sup>176</sup> Douglas A. Hall, Judy Hall, Steve Daman, and Jeffrey Boss, “Living-System Ministry Ushers in the New Jerusalem,” in *Reaching for the New Jerusalem*, 86.

takes the whole gospel to the whole city.”<sup>177</sup> As Jim Herrington of Mission Houston says, “The hope of the world is the church, but not necessarily the local congregation.”<sup>178</sup>

It is helpful to appreciate the significance of church unity, from a recent historical and sociological perspective. In *Believing in the Future*, Bosch spells out his vision for mission in the post-Christian West by explaining that an ecumenical missiology is essential in order to model to the world as much unity between churches as is practically possible.<sup>179</sup> Comparing the pressing need for unity with the experience of the Church throughout the last century, Ballard states that:

If the last century was the ecumenical century, breaking down the walls of partition then perhaps the issue for this century will be that of catholicity – of finding out how to be one Church of Christ in a divided, multi-cultural, shifting global village, that takes variety seriously while at the same time recognizes the essential reality of the common life that has to be expressed. The richness of ecumenical experience, with its discovery of shared foundations in faith and practice, ought to be the basis for this quest.<sup>180</sup>

Keller also speaks to the contrast between a Christendom era which fostered “a sense of Christian distinctives among Christian groups” and a Post-Christendom North America which we inhabit today, where it is “much more illuminating and helpful for churches to define themselves in contrast to the values of a non-Christian culture.”<sup>181</sup> Keller goes on to passionately implore for church unity by proclaiming that “if we are not united the

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<sup>177</sup> Swanson, *To Transform a City*, 99.

<sup>178</sup> Swanson, *To Transform a City*, 100.

<sup>179</sup> David J. Bosch, *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture* (Valley Forge, PA.: Trinity Press International, 1995), 62.

<sup>180</sup> Ballard, “Requiem for Ecumenism? Some Personal Reflections,” 225-230.

<sup>181</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 367-368.

world writes us off, and perhaps, in light of Jesus high priestly prayer that we ‘may be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me,’ they have a right to do so!”<sup>182</sup> Three primary elements appear to be at play within current GCMs that help to build and reinforce church unity: (1) relationship, (2) prayer, and (3) missional activity.

### The Priority of Relationship

Advocates of GCMs are characteristically attuned to building strong interpersonal relationships and promoting investment into relational equity among the leaders and pastors of city movements. The focus on cultivating intentional relationships with one another has special significance when considered in light of broad socio-cultural changes expressly borne out in city life. Broadly speaking, there has been a growing relational void in the U.S. for many years. Vance Packard spoke to this phenomenon in its early stages of development by noting how the U.S. was rapidly becoming “a nation of strangers in which people are disturbed by the feeling that they are rootless or increasingly anonymous, that they are living in a continuously changing environment where there is little sense of community.”<sup>183</sup>

In light of this challenge, Whitlock argues that relationships in today’s culture are especially critical, because the loss of community and belonging is more urgent than at any other time since the end of the Roman Empire.<sup>184</sup> Reflecting on these conditions

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<sup>182</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 367-368.

<sup>183</sup> Vance Packard, *A Nation of Strangers* (New York, NY: David McKay Publications, 1972), 9.

<sup>184</sup> Whitlock, *Divided We Fall*, 71.

from a theological perspective, Miroslav Volf points out that, “in the battle against evil, especially against the evil in one’s own culture, evangelical personality needs ecumenical community.”<sup>185</sup>

Within this socio-cultural milieu, GCM leaders have resoundingly emphasized the priority of building intentional relationships between leaders and pastors in city movements. Tom White captures this sentiment by expressing that, “you cannot build a sustainable city-reaching movement on cooperative projects, events or occasional tactical endeavors. It takes time, in a non-distracting environment, to build trust in a relationship, to discover and appreciate one another, to share common meals, to agonize over our pains and problems, and to rejoice in God’s goodness.”<sup>186</sup> Keller underscores Francis Shaeffer’s category of seeing Christians’ relationships with each other as the “final apologetic” – so that Christian community is the criterion that the world uses to judge whether the Christian message is indeed truthful.<sup>187</sup> Swanson also connects the experience of relationship to one’s conception of the Church. It is crucial for the pastoral community in a city to form deep personal relationships, not just to meet the personal needs of leaders but also because when “pastors and leaders unify around friendship they come to the conclusion that it’s not about my church; it’s really about the church.”<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 53.

<sup>186</sup> White, *City-Wide Prayer Movements*, 41.

<sup>187</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 41.

<sup>188</sup> Swanson, *To Transform a City*, 105.

A key ingredient embedded within the experience of building relationships is the call to relational diversity across theological, ecclesial, economic, cultural and racial lines. Relational diversity is imperative because, “if we cannot worship together and transcend differences, how has the gospel manifested itself as a new community and a new reality in our cities?”<sup>189</sup> To put it even more forcefully: “A homogenous church in a heterogeneous society is an ecclesiastical heresy.”<sup>190</sup>

The need for relational diversity appears to be a common concern today, as a white evangelical community that largely abandoned the city in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is now attempting to reengage with the urban core of these cities.<sup>191</sup> Appreciating the historically racially charged issue of diversity, Clifford Green proposes that “the term ‘urban ministry’ was itself a victim of the urban-suburban split that the Church was trying to overcome.”<sup>192</sup> Green advises that our efforts toward relational diversity must carefully resist adopting a “conceptuality and terminology that perpetuates the very bifurcation it is trying to overcome.”<sup>193</sup> Bakke also agrees that, “race and the identity of peoples is one of the most significant issues in our cities.”<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Keller, *Loving the City*, 184.

<sup>190</sup> Keller, *Loving the City*, 184.

<sup>191</sup> Green, *Churches, Cities, and Human Community*, 7.

<sup>192</sup> Green, *Churches, Cities, and Human Community*, 298.

<sup>193</sup> Green, *Churches, Cities, and Human Community*, 298.

<sup>194</sup> Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City*, 177.

In addition to diversity, another central factor involved in the promotion of relationships is trust. As a senior advisor to Lausanne on Global City Movements, Mac Pier believes all the challenges that face the Church in our cities can be largely overcome by trust. Pier reflects that at the genesis of New York's GCM in the early 1990's an "incredibly important truth was coming to light; the greatest need in our city is not money, space or programs but trust between diverse people of faith."<sup>195</sup> Whitlock describes the inner workings and effects of building trust by explaining that:

Building bridges of communication and cooperation will be a critical step toward strengthening relationships. When we spend time getting to know Christians outside our immediate circles—listening to their stories and discovering what God has done in their lives—we find ourselves enriched and our horizons enlarged. Our own identities are strengthened as we tell stories of our history that are dear to us.<sup>196</sup>

As a key element of church unity, the focus on relationship in GCMs includes the elements of intentionality, diversity, and the building of trust.

### The Priority of Prayer

The priority of prayer is another essential dynamic in GCMs that is seen as correlating with the development of church unity. As a leader who has been involved in catalyzing GCMs around the world, Tom White has especially emphasized various forms of unified prayer. White contends that it's not humanly possible to create true gospel unity. Rather, it is a "spiritual grace that we receive and maintain."<sup>197</sup> White goes on to

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<sup>195</sup> Pier, *A Disruptive Gospel*, 32.

<sup>196</sup> Whitlock, *Divided We Fall*, loc. 3479.

<sup>197</sup> Tom White, *The Practitioners Guide: Building City Gospel Movements* (Tallmadge, OH: Good Place Publishing, 2013), 28.



explain that unity is given by God when through praying together “we give ourselves to extended times with God and one another,” and that this happens practically when GCM leaders facilitate “repetitive gatherings...by leaders in a city engaging in regular times of prayer.”<sup>198</sup> Practicing unified prayer is how an authentic unity is developed and expressed as a significant feature of kingdom culture.<sup>199</sup>

From a historical perspective, united prayer has been instrumental in bringing about church unity and revival. It’s from this standpoint that Keller advocates for “prayer movements uniting churches across traditions in visionary intercession for the city,” remembering that “the history of revivals shows the vital importance of corporate, prevailing, visionary intercessory prayer for the city.”<sup>200</sup> Keller goes on to contend that praying together for the city is a biblical directive, and that united prayer is “catalytic for creating friendships and relationships across denominational and organizational boundaries.”<sup>201</sup> Noted revival historian and renowned prayer authority, Dr. J. Edwin Orr, echoes this view, believing that “focused prayers can affect community, city, state, nation, and world” and that “spiritual revivals of the past are the direct result of concerted, extraordinary, and united prayer.”<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> White, *The Practitioners Guide*, 28.

<sup>199</sup> White, *The Practitioners Guide*, 28.

<sup>200</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 373-374.

<sup>201</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 373-374.

<sup>202</sup> Lorraine Cleaves Anderson, “Under One Steeple: Biblical and Theological Foundations for Sharing Church Space,” in *Reaching for the New Jerusalem*, 163.

The expression of increased united prayer has concurrently grown with the proliferation of GCMs over the past 25 years. In his book *City-Wide Prayer Movements*, White chronicles the resurgence of prayer movements around the world as being initiated in the 1990's, stating that "many historians will point back to the 1990's as a decade of rising passion for worship and intercessory prayer."<sup>203</sup> Bakke commends his support for this resurgence by expressing that "I'm very supportive of prayer walks, prayer houses and concerts of prayer movements in urban contexts. John Dawson, Ed Silvos and David Bryant have been used of God mightily in our day to remind the church to pray for and pray in cities."<sup>204</sup> Prayer has been a considerable factor in the growth of New York's GCM during the past two decades. In his analysis and timeline of this growth, Pier carefully acknowledges the movement's rootedness in prayer, by noting that "disrupting a city's natural disunity requires an informed prayer movement."<sup>205</sup> Pier also reflects that "the beauty of spiritual leaders assembling to pray is that it creates camaraderie that allows leaders to work together year-round."<sup>206</sup>

Practicing united prayer continues to be a central focus for GCMs, which in turn helps to shape and strengthen church unity. White proposes that at its foundations, city-reaching movements require united, corporate prayer, because "being in the presence of God together is the touchstone of our journey" and that to get away in prayer retreats as

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<sup>203</sup> White, *City-Wide Prayer Movements*, 11-14.

<sup>204</sup> Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City*, 209.

<sup>205</sup> Pier, *A Disruptive Gospel*, 37.

<sup>206</sup> Pier, *A Disruptive Gospel*, 32.

city-leaders “builds trust in a relationship, to discover and appreciate one another, to share common needs, to agonize over pains and problems and to rejoice in God’s goodness.”<sup>207</sup> David Bryant, a longtime proponent and pioneer of prayer movements believes that prayer produces an “urban-sized Christ-awakening in answer to our persevering intercession.”<sup>208</sup>

### The Priority of Missional Activity

The priorities of building intentional relationships and practicing united prayer inherently lead to partnering together in missional activity. This reasoning is central to GCMs, who in contrast to many prior expressions of ministerial city fellowships or associations, gather together not simply for the sake of unity, but for the sake of collaborative mission. Swanson captures this outlook of GCMs by observing that “the end of our unity is not simply good relationships between fellow Christians. Instead it is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel in the world.”<sup>209</sup> Bakke also cautions that prayer, while vitally necessary, is not only an end to itself: “My concern is that this should never be seen as a sufficient strategy for urban concern or involvement. An exclusively spiritual concern for cities can come close to a neo-agnosticism...”<sup>210</sup> At the heart of GCMs is therefore the commitment to actually “do” something together. As

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<sup>207</sup> White, *City-Wide Prayer Movements*, 41.

<sup>208</sup> White, *City-Wide Prayer Movements*, 11-14.

<sup>209</sup> Swanson, *To Transform a City*, 107.

<sup>210</sup> Swanson, *To Transform a City*, 107.

Keller underscores, “Christians must work for the peace, security, justice and prosperity of their neighbors, loving them in word and deed.”<sup>211</sup>

The priorities of relationship building, united prayer, and missional activity are patterned in the varied expressions of GCMs. Swanson has observed that as pastors unite they discover that “being a missional church is not about them; it’s about the community they are called to serve,” leading them to begin thinking that “now that we like each other we really ought to do something together.”<sup>212</sup> Local church unity thus appears to be primarily demonstrated by an intentionality towards relationship, prayer and missional activity. The socio-spiritual conditions that this unity engenders has given GCMs the focus they need to exhibit a more intentional missional collaboration.

### *Missional Collaboration*

The emerging GCM characteristics of local orientation and church unity give rise to a third major distinctive embodied by GCMs, which is missional collaboration. GCMs appear to be dedicated to unity not for the sake of unity alone, but unity for the sake of mission in their particular urban locale, with all of its peculiarities that demand for a contextualized approach by the represented body of Christ. The nature of missional collaboration then, involves a “mission” that is influenced by the uniqueness of the city, and by a “collaboration” that is marked by genuine unity over against a shallow version of uniformity.

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<sup>211</sup> Keller, *Loving the City*, 159.

<sup>212</sup> Swanson, *To Transform a City*, 106.

Missional collaboration is contextually oriented with reference to the uniqueness of the city. David Currie reflects this concept by explaining that:

Because the church as the “people of God” is inherently communal, it has been particularly compatible with the largest communities of people, cities. Because the church is also the sent people of God, it is also inherently missional, and consequently intentional about interpenetrating the complexities of urban society as yeast, salt, and light. This interpenetration, when it was authentic, allowed for mutual influence from the city upon the church. Ideally, this influence shaped the context for mission—changing the kind of loaf, the dimensions of the saltshaker, or the color of the lantern that best fit that particular time and place.<sup>213</sup>

Missional collaboration also differentiates an authentic unity from thin uniformity. Daniel Um and Dhati Lewis address the difference between unity and uniformity by clarifying how:

Uniformity is a group of people pursuing a common purpose with only one strategy. This is when a person thinks that unity is assimilation, where the goal is to make look-a-likes of whomever the strongest or most prominent person in the room is. Uniformity kills true diversity in the body because it reinforces parroting, inauthenticity, and outward conformity. Unity, on the other hand, is a group of people banding together for a common purpose, in their own unique strategies. Unity looks like a football team. You have a group of people with different positions and different responsibilities, but they are all trying to achieve the same goal. And that goal is what drives them. In unity, there is dignity, empowerment, and trust.<sup>214</sup>

In the shared majority of GCMs, this missional collaboration seems to be centered around three preeminent domains: (1) spiritual, (2) social and (3) cultural. These domains are articulated by Alan Platt, leader of City Changers, an organization that encourages and coaches the planting and growth of GCMs. Platt discusses missional collaboration in this way:

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<sup>213</sup> Currie, “Ecclesiapolis,” in *Reaching for the New Jerusalem*, 39.

<sup>214</sup> Dhati Lewis, *Among Wolves: Disciple-Making in the City* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), 147.

Transformation will not happen unless we harness the collective capacity of the Kingdom in the regions we serve. Among pastors, there is a growing realization that their local churches cannot do the job alone... If the mission and vision of city-movements is to be fully addressed it must be centered around the spiritual, social, and cultural outcomes of the city.<sup>215</sup>

Swanson uses slightly different headings that nevertheless speak to the essence of the same spheres of influence, namely, “good deeds, goodwill and good news.”<sup>216</sup> These three domains can also be expressed as issues of common witness (i.e., spiritual, good news), common good (i.e., social, good deeds) and common voice (i.e., cultural, goodwill). Along with these three domains, there is also a growing commitment toward measuring progress across these three arenas, in the form of what can be called common outcomes. Tangible outcomes are expressed in various ways, such as “transformation,” “impact,” and “fruitfulness.” The central feature of missional collaboration is thus discussed in the following section in terms of common witness, common good, common voice, and common outcomes.

### Common Witness

In addressing the growing Western trends toward pluralism and relativism in the urban centers of North America, Newbigin advocates for the need of the collective Church to uphold a “public truth.”<sup>217</sup> That is, that the mission of the Church must follow the “command of Jesus to make known His hope” so that it “will come to be seen for

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<sup>215</sup> Allan Platt, “Where Do We Go from Here?” Good News Florida, 2018, <https://www.goodnewsfl.org/church-unity-go/>, accessed September 25, 2018.

<sup>216</sup> Swanson, *To Transform a City*, 128.

<sup>217</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 224-235.

themselves (all cultures, races and people) as the truth.”<sup>218</sup> For Newbigin, the need for the Church’s united witness is seen as something far more than individual “missions” or “outreach” programs, but rather as the Church joining with what God is already enacting. Therefore, “It is impossible to stress too strongly that the beginning of mission is not an action of ours, but the presence of a new reality, the presence of the Spirit of God in power.”<sup>219</sup>

According to Bosch, the pressing need for the Church’s common witness arose out of the ecumenism of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, which sought to capture the twin ideas of both “unity and mission.” So that, flowing out of an awareness of the communion with Christ and with others a dynamism is generated that impels Christians to give a visible witness together. It is this sense of unified mission in which Newbigin points out that the Church should be exhibiting, because “The Church is nothing other than that movement launched into the public life of the world by its sovereign Lord to continue that which he came to do until it is finished in his return in glory.”<sup>220</sup> Although unified mission was the goal, Bosch points out that challenges especially expressed at a local level in the area of “church planting” ultimately resulted in the concept mostly dying out.<sup>221</sup> The phrase is being recaptured by 21<sup>st</sup> century Evangelicals that are propagating GCMs to describe

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<sup>218</sup> Paul Weston, *Lesslie Newbigin, Missionary Theologian: A Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 228.

<sup>219</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 119.

<sup>220</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 221.

<sup>221</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 478.

their historical, theological and missional imperative for evangelism, discipleship and church planting.

Although Evangelical churches have always prioritized the witness of local churches through evangelism and discipleship, GCMs are identifying a new found interest in collaborating to see these outcomes grow cooperatively. In identifying the spiritual outcomes for the GCMs that he works with, Platt describes common witness as a “spiritual challenge” to own “the lost-ness of your city” and provide an actual metric to “estimate the number or percentage of unsaved people in your region and see them as the group that you are dedicated to reaching.”<sup>222</sup> This approach is similar to the priorities expressed by Keller<sup>223</sup> and Pier<sup>224</sup> in reference to New York, which center around evangelism, church planting, and tracking with the percentage of the city’s total population in church worship attendance. Keller presents a holistic picture of spiritual activities in his discussion of embracing a Pauline priority on church planning, by stating that “Paul never evangelizes and disciples without also planting a church.”<sup>225</sup> Furthermore, Keller believes that a “tacit, dubious cessation is at work” to minimize this priority of church planting.<sup>226</sup> In Hunter’s idea of establishing a vision for “a new city commons” rooted in what he has termed “faithful presence,” our unity has a purpose

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<sup>222</sup> Platt, “Church Unity, Where Do We Go from Here?”  
<https://www.goodnewsfl.org/church-unity-go/>, accessed September 25, 2018.

<sup>223</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 355.

<sup>224</sup> Pier, *A Disruptive Gospel*, 22.

<sup>225</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 355.

<sup>226</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 355.



beyond beliefs and faith, and extends to a larger purpose in two areas: making disciples and serving the common good.<sup>227</sup> Here once again, we see this imperative of making disciples that is rooted in a spiritual outcome arising from the Church's common witness.

The trend of missional collaboration expressing itself in common witness, is also discussed by Swanson, who quotes the following research report cited in the *Leadership Journal*. In a 1998 study that surveyed 700 evangelical pastors, only 51 percent of pastors agreed that "partnerships are essential in accomplishing the gospel mission." Ten years later, in 2008 that number had grown to 75 percent. Additionally, in the 1998 study the pastors were asked the question, "As a leader, do you see church evangelism efforts primarily to grow 'my' church or 'the' church?" The 1998 results of the survey showed that 39 percent of pastors answered "my church." However in 2008, 93 percent of pastors answered "the Church."<sup>228</sup> Although not opposed to "evangelistic campaigns" that were characteristic of 20<sup>th</sup> century revival movements, it appears that GCMs see the concerted efforts of local churches as the central element of common witness.

The developing posture of local churches working together for a common witness follows Newbigin's admonishment:

I am, of course, not denying the importance of the many activities by which we seek to challenge public life with the gospel – evangelistic campaigns, distribution of Bibles and Christian literature, conferences, and even books such as this one. But I am saying that these are all secondary, and that they have power to accomplish their purpose only as they are rooted in and lead back to a believing community.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, & Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 280-281.

<sup>228</sup> Swanson, *To Transform a City*, 110.

<sup>229</sup> Weston, *Lesslie Newbigin, Missionary Theologian*, 152.

Newbigin argued that the best hermeneutic was local congregations living as a visible family of unity, noting that, “it is this indissoluble unity of having and hoping, this presence now of something which is a pledge of the future, it is this which constitutes the Church as witness.”<sup>230</sup> Keller and other members of the Gospel Coalition express their aspirations this way:

We hope to draw highly secular and postmodern people, as well as reaching religious and traditional people. Because of the attractiveness of its community and the humility of its people, a gospel-centered church should find people in its midst who are exploring and trying to understand Christianity. It must welcome them in hundreds of ways. It will do little to make them “comfortable” but will do much to make its message understandable.<sup>231</sup>

The GCM leadership in Denver reflects the spirit of common witness in this way: “As church leaders, we began to dream about what it would look like to start a neighboring movement among our people and in our city. We decided to come together and, with one voice, create a joint sermon series around the idea of taking the Great Commandment literally.”<sup>232</sup>

Having a common narrative, with a core Gospel message is a hallmark of the churches that are joining GCMs. This is especially needed now, because the American Church increasingly faces a cultural opposition to the Gospel, such that evangelicals

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<sup>230</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 120.

<sup>231</sup> D.A. Carson and Tim Keller, *The Gospel as Center: Renewing our Faith and Reforming our Ministry Practices* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishing, 2012), 284.

<sup>232</sup> Pathak and Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring*, 21.

“must focus more closely on what they hold in common.”<sup>233</sup> According to Newbigin, this approach is essential in witness because it builds a “plausibility structure” for an unbelieving culture that “is by definition the frame within which one makes all decisions.”<sup>234</sup> Acknowledging the need for a common witness, and purposefully engaging in acts of common witness, is a central characteristic of present-day GCMs. This common witness is being expressed in a more holistic response that goes beyond the prior conversionist attitudes of fundamentalist evangelicalism in an effort to impact 21<sup>st</sup> century cities.

### Common Good

GCMs have arisen out of an evangelical milieu that inherited a 20<sup>th</sup> century missional bias against social concern for the common good. As previously explored in this chapter, evangelical skepticism towards social concerns dates back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and persisted throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Commenting on this missional bias, Bosch points out that “revivalism and evangelicalism’s emphasis shifted away from social involvement to exclusively verbal evangelism.”<sup>235</sup> George Marsden explains how this created an evangelical environment in which “progressive social concern, whether political or private, became suspect among revivalist evangelicals and was relegated to a

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<sup>233</sup> Whitlock, *Divided We Fall*, Front Matter.

<sup>234</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 100.

<sup>235</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 309.

very minor role.”<sup>236</sup> Bosch longed for the day when the long rift in Western evangelicalism between spiritual and social priorities would be set aside in favor of a true ecumenism that embraced both concerns as missional mandates:

One attempt to solve the enigma of the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility is to distinguish between two different mandates, the one spiritual, the other social. The first refers to the commission to announce the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ; the second calls Christians to responsible participation in human society, including working for human well-being and justice.<sup>237</sup>

Not only did the narrow fundamentalist dichotomy between “spiritual” and “worldly” activity isolate evangelicals from common good activity, but their intense commitment to American individualism also appears to have hindered their ability to produce a common and impactful social agenda. As Christian Smith explains:

Also indicative of the personal influence strategy that pervades evangelical thinking about social change is the recurrent emphasis on each individual’s personal choice about where and how to get involved in social change efforts. Seldom did evangelicals speak about the church having a common, collective calling to model an alternative social order, or to throw its unified weight behind a particular vision of social change.<sup>238</sup>

Bosch lays out a more comprehensive understanding of participation in the common good, by which Christians can provide to humanity as a people, beyond our individual or personalized response, in the context of building community. In Bosch’s view:

The individual is not a monad, but part of an organism. We live in one world, in which the rescue of some at the expense of others is not possible. Only together is there salvation and survival. This includes not only a new relationship to nature, but also among humans. The “psychology of separateness” has to make way for

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<sup>236</sup> George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 86.

<sup>237</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 395.

<sup>238</sup> Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 198.

an “epistemology of participation.” The “me generation” has to be superseded by the “us generation.” The “instrumental” reason of the Enlightenment has to be supplemented with “communicative” reason (Habermas), since human existence is by definition intersubjective existence. Here lies the pertinence of the rediscovery of the church as Body of Christ and of the Christian mission as building a community of those who share a common destiny.<sup>239</sup>

According to Tennent, it was in this struggle that the phrase “new evangelical” was coined. Tennent explained that the new evangelical:

Embraces the full orthodoxy of fundamentalism in doctrine, but manifests a social consciousness and responsibility which was strangely absent from fundamentalism. The new evangelicalism concerns itself not only with personal salvation, doctrinal truth, and an external point of reference, but also ... believes that orthodox Christians cannot abdicate their responsibility in the social scene.<sup>240</sup>

Bosch also points out how this conversation has evolved within the thinking of the conservative evangelical community, by citing how John Stott, a leading thought leader of 20<sup>th</sup> century evangelicalism, actually changed his thinking and language around the issue when he recognized: “I now see more clearly that not only the consequences of the commission but the actual commission itself must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility, unless we are to be guilty of distorting the words of Jesus.”<sup>241</sup> It was in line with this refurbished understanding of the gospel that Lausanne affirmed: “Evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbor and our obedience to Jesus Christ.”<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 352.

<sup>240</sup> Tennent, *An Invitation to World Missions*, 90.

<sup>241</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 415.

<sup>242</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 396.

Given these historical precursors, present-day GCMs are working hard to present a more holistic understanding and approach to gospel ministry by seeking to engage more fully with the realities they face in their cities. The Foundation Documents of the Gospel Coalition represent key artifacts that exemplify an attempt to recover this more holistic sense of the gospel and approach to mission, reflecting a renewed social concern for the common good. Authored by conservative evangelicals, these documents express the desire to overcome the long standing divide between a unilateral salvific methodology to a more comprehensive perspective of missions:

Therefore God is concerned not only for the salvation of souls but also for the relief of poverty, hunger, and injustice. The gospel opens our eyes to the fact that all our wealth (even wealth for which we worked hard) is ultimately an unmerited gift from God. The gospel replaces superiority toward the poor with mercy and compassion. Christian churches must work for justice and peace in their neighborhoods through service even as they call individuals to conversion and the new birth. We must work for the eternal and common good and show our neighbors we love them sacrificially whether they believe as we do or not. Indifference to the poor and disadvantaged means there has not been a true grasp of our salvation by sheer grace.<sup>243</sup>

The fruition of these aspirations are coming into fuller bloom in the missional collaboration that GCMs espouse. GCM leaders are echoing what Bosch articulated when he wrote that: “To win people to Jesus is to win their allegiance to God's priorities. God wills not only that we be rescued from hell and redeemed for heaven, but also that within us—and through our ministry also in society around us—the ‘fullness of Christ’ be re-created, the image of God be restored in our lives and relationships.”<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Edward K. Copeland, “Why All Christians Must Seek Public Justice,” The Gospel Coalition, 2018, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-all-christians-must-seek-public-justice/>, accessed September 22, 2018.

<sup>244</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 410.

As an experienced youth specialist working in the urban context, Dean Borgman concurs with this vision by contending that, “what is needed is a whole new vision of the way society might work for the common good of all.”<sup>245</sup> Furthermore, this understanding of who we are as God’s people in the city calls us to particular and measurable actions that are “expected to ameliorate the ills of society and encourage positive action toward the common good.”<sup>246</sup> Churches collaborating together for the common good may become even more urgent because, “as our country grows less supportive of – and even hostile to – Christianity, it will be necessary to learn to listen to each other and work together for the common good.”<sup>247</sup>

Pathak and Runyon embody these sentiments in the Denver GCM that they serve.

These GCM leaders reflect that:

What’s more, good neighboring is not about doing charity work. It’s not simply about doing for others and looking for ways to give and give and give. Rather, good neighboring is about helping to create a sense of community within your neighborhood. It’s about empowering people and breaking down walls. It’s about everybody doing something together for the common good.<sup>248</sup>

Kevin Palau, President of the Luis Palau Association, also exemplifies this holistic approach to gospel engagement in his work with the GCM in Portland, OR. As the son of one of the leading evangelical evangelists of the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century, Luis Palau, Kevin

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<sup>245</sup> Dean Borgman, “Roadblocks to the New Jerusalem Facing Urban Youth and Communities,” in *Reaching for the New Jerusalem*, 78.

<sup>246</sup> Borgman, “Roadblocks to the New Jerusalem,” in *Reaching for the New Jerusalem*, 74.

<sup>247</sup> Whitlock, *Divided We Fall*, loc. 293.

<sup>248</sup> Pathak and Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring*, 121.

discovered that to effectively minister in one of the most socially progressive and unchurched cities in North America, he would need to develop a more holistic and collaborative approach to mission. In his book, *Unlikely: Setting Aside Our Differences to Live Out the Gospel*, Palau shares his testimony of collaborating with the gay mayor of the city to unite around common good issues:

New models of collaboration continue to thrive as trust is being established by a generation of evangelical Christians drawn to social justice and a hands-on expression of faith. They are joining hands with community leaders and our *literal* neighbors to build a healthy community, strong public schools, and a safe and clean environment for everyone.<sup>249</sup>

Palau believes that these efforts will produce, not just social transformation and common good results, but will also lead to tangible spiritual outcomes: “The message of our lives as Christians is the message of Jesus. The simple, beautiful story of the Son of God, who came to serve, who gave His life, who died on the cross, and who rose again so that each and every one of us may have life, and life in abundance.”<sup>250</sup> These efforts have given the Church an opportunity to change the public perception of who evangelicals are and what they stand for in the cities that they inhabit. As Palau recounts: “We were tired of the ‘us vs. them’ mentality. We were ready to do something to tear down the walls that separated so many.”<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Kevin Palau, *Unlikely: Setting Aside Our Differences to Live Out the Gospel* (New York, NY: Howard Books, 2015), 41.

<sup>250</sup> Kevin Palau, “An Unlikely Church-State Partnership in Portland,” On Faith, 2018, [www.onfaith.co](https://www.onfaith.co). <https://www.onfaith.co/onfaith/2015/06/03/an-unlikely-church-state-partnership-in-portland>, accessed September 25, 2018.

<sup>251</sup> Palau, “An Unlikely Church-State Partnership in Portland,” <https://www.onfaith.co/onfaith/2015/06/03/an-unlikely-church-state-partnership-in-portland>, accessed September 25, 2018.



It's not that all GCM participants share an identical theological perspective on this issue, but rather they are willing to set aside the particularities of their differences for the sake of missional collaboration in a way that earlier evangelicals could not. Tennent captures this perspective by clarifying:

In other words, there continues to be broad differences on how we should express the relationship between evangelism and social action. Some evangelicals see relief and development as a bridge to evangelism. Others conceptualize relief and development as a natural consequence of evangelism. Still others try to see the two as complementary partners. In any case, they are broadly understood as vitally important, but distinct, ministries of the church. Evangelism is understood narrowly as an explicit presentation of the gospel, and social action is viewed as serving a supporting role of bearing witness to the gospel or, at times, as a tool that leads to a greater acceptance of the gospel message. Sometimes social action is portrayed in ways that convey the idea that it is a form of stealth evangelism or a strategic kind of tactic that has no lasting merit unless it culminates in evangelism. Once evangelism and social action are conceptualized as two separate spheres, it is inevitable that evangelism is given a priority over social action, and various explanations are required to demonstrate how social action leads to, culminates in, or arises out of evangelism and church planting.<sup>252</sup>

Missional collaboration for the common good has thus become one of the budding features of emerging GCMs. Again, this characteristic is juxtaposed to previous generations of evangelicals who tended to focus on the individual or the denomination rather than the collective Church. As Christian Smith points out, "rarely did evangelicals talk about the need for individual believers to yield their own interests and concerns in order to unite behind one common project, campaign, program, or position. Instead, evangelicals typically underscored the uniqueness of each individual's involvement."<sup>253</sup> Keller also contrasts institutional focus with broader Church collaboration by observing

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<sup>252</sup> Tennent, *An Invitation to World Missions*, 393.

<sup>253</sup> Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 193.

that, “some churches identify so strongly with their own theological tradition that they cannot make common cause with other evangelical churches or other institutions to reach a city or work for the common good.”<sup>254</sup> This ethos appears to be driving GCMs to adopt a holistic mission that embodies a common witness and seeks to faithfully proclaim an orthodox soteriology, while at the same time contributing to the common good of their cities by meeting the social needs that they encounter.

### Common Voice

A third distinct feature of missional collaboration in GCMs is the domain of common voice. It was with reference to this cultural domain, that Newbigin began to identify how a privatized faith in a secular society would cripple the witness of the Church: “To be faithful to a message which concerns the kingdom of God, his rule over all things and all peoples, the Church has to claim the high ground of public truth. Every human society is governed by assumptions, normally taken for granted without question, about what is real, what is important, what is worth aiming for.”<sup>255</sup> For Newbigin, the challenge is for the Church to reclaim and reengage in providing a public truth for society: “What could it mean for the Church to make once again the claim which it made in its earliest centuries, the claim to provide the public truth by which society can be given coherence and direction?”<sup>256</sup> The call for a more public truth also challenges

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<sup>254</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 23.

<sup>255</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 224.

<sup>256</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 226.

Christian leadership to stand up and speak to cultural issues facing the city, because “If the gospel is the good news of the reign of God over the whole of life, public no less than private; if the Church is therefore called to address the whole public life of the community as well as the personal lives of men and women in the private and domestic affairs, what kind of ministerial leadership is needed?”<sup>257</sup> Based on this rationale, it can be further reasoned that having something to say publically, as a community, includes having a common voice around common truth. It is in this space of cultural engagement, that GCMs are discovering new expressions of common voice influence.

The need for a common voice recognizes the cultural domain as a distinct sphere of social influence that is different from the political domain. Historically, the recent trend has been for the national political voice of American evangelicalism to override any socio-cultural voice they may have attempted to promote. This prevailing bent towards a political witness is explained by Hunter: “It is not an exaggeration to say that the dominant public witness of the Christian churches in America since the early 1980s has been a political witness.”<sup>258</sup> However, GCMs appear to be committed to offset the political and polarizing nature of a national evangelical voice, with a more humble voice that speaks to the local needs and aspirations of their cities.

To this point, Miroslav Volf writes that, “Christian communities [should be] more comfortable with being just one of many players, so that from whatever place they find themselves – on the margins, at the center, or anywhere in between – they can promote

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<sup>257</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 236.

<sup>258</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 12.

human flourishing and the common good.”<sup>259</sup> Volf goes on to speak of two “malfunctions” that a religious faith can exhibit in its relationship with culture. One he calls “idleness,” which manifests in cultural withdrawal and passivity; and the other “coerciveness,” which includes the misuse of power and control. Keller articulates a theological rationale for how the Church can winsomely and enthusiastically engage their culture without falling into the malfunction of either of these two extremes. Namely, “We teach Christians to integrate their faith and their work so they can be culture makers, working for human flourishing —the common good. The “already but not yet” of the kingdom keeps us from utopian, triumphalistic visions of cultural takeover on the one hand, and from pessimism or withdrawal from society on the other.”<sup>260</sup>

Pier draws attention to this key sphere of influence by pointing out that in the New York City context, one of the primary markers of a successful GCM is that “Christians find themselves in places of cultural influence” and that they are able to “penetrate arenas of influence.”<sup>261</sup> The need for the Church to engage culture with a common voice is further explained by Keller:

It is not enough that the church should counter the values of the dominant culture. We must be a counter – culture for the common good. We want to be radically distinct from the culture around us and yet, out of that distinct identity, we should sacrificially serve neighbors and even enemies, working for the flourishing of people, both here and now, and in eternity.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 79.

<sup>260</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 47.

<sup>261</sup> Pier, *A Disruptive Gospel*, 22.

<sup>262</sup> Carson and Keller, *The Gospel as Center*, 282.

Keller also pleads for the cultural engagement of the Church by admonishing:

Isn't it a major problem that Christians are vastly underrepresented in many sectors of the cultural economy? Absolutely. In the visual arts, literature and poetry, theater and dance, academic and legal philosophy, academic think tanks, major research universities, leading opinion magazines and journals, high-end journalism, most major foundations, public television, film, and high-end advertising agencies —there are few or no recognizably Christian voices.<sup>263</sup>

### Common Outcomes

As missional collaboration has found local expression through GCMs in the spiritual, social and cultural spheres, there has been a growing desire to measure the impact of these joint efforts through focusing on common outcomes. The attempts of GCMs to work towards clarifying and establishing unified objectives can be seen as another facet of purposeful church unity. However, this unity is not demonstrated in uniform ways across GCMs or even within a particular region, but rather appears to pursue common overarching outcomes without necessarily dictating identical activities. The principle that “unity does not necessarily require uniformity,” is particularly helpful here in relating common outcomes to diverse activities. The theological, ethnic and racial differences present in every city, demand that GCM leaders take seriously a commitment to diversity. Mirosław Volf appears to capture the dynamics of GCMs when he proposes that “baptism into Christ creates a people as the differentiated body of Christ. Bodily inscribed differences are brought together, not removed. The body of Christ lives as a complex interplay of differentiated bodies...”<sup>264</sup> The challenge for GCMs is to integrate the differences in the local body of Christ as an advantage in impacting their

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<sup>263</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 223.

<sup>264</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 48.

cities, not by dictating uniformity with respect to shared activities, but by building unified, measurable, and effective outcomes that relate to the spiritual, social, and cultural domains.

Thought formation around common outcomes is beginning to bubble up within this space, as leading voices and architectural shapers of GCMs are starting to express a growing desire to see real transformational impact result from their diverse activities. For example, in his book *City Reaching*, Jack Dennison explains that, “we see repetitive efforts to demonstrate our unity through citywide worship events, prayer vigils... and other similar events. These activities... are wonderful symbols of our unity but they rarely produce real substance. They make us feel good and sometimes result in great newspaper coverage, but the cities remain unchanged.”<sup>265</sup> Mac Pier and other New York City GCM leaders have especially focused on working toward a “tipping point” metric in their city, with respect to the percentage of people worshiping in evangelical churches. According to research conducted by the Values Research Institute in Manhattan, this number grew from under one percent in 2008 to over five percent in 2014.<sup>266</sup> For GCM leaders in New York, the tipping point goal is to reach 10%, which Pier and Keller believe will “represent a historic achievement in the evangelization of the most globally significant community in the world.”<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Jack Dennison, *City Reaching: On the Road to Community Transformation* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 61-62.

<sup>266</sup> Pier, *A Disruptive Gospel*, 46.

<sup>267</sup> Pier, *A Disruptive Gospel*, 47.

Pier also connects the acknowledgement of a GCMs presence in a city, with the achievement of distinct outcomes in the spiritual, social, and cultural domains. In other words, according to Pier, the question of how we know a gospel movement is actually happening in a city is answered by the effects that are being accomplished in the city these three arenas. For Pier, these three domains are operationalized roughly by describing them with the following metrics:

- (1) Spiritual: Christianity is growing faster than the general population.
- (2) Social: Christianity is achieving measurable progress against the great social and humanitarian problems.
- (3) Cultural: Christians are increasingly finding themselves in places of cultural influence.<sup>268</sup>

As an example of South Florida's Church United GCM, Allan Platt has helped develop practical goals related to the broader spiritual, social and cultural outcomes. These goals delineate concrete results that materialize and fit the broader domain outcomes to the contextually specific needs of the city.

- Spiritual outcome: Our practical goal is to focus on spiritual outreach to the region to see a specific percentage increase in Christ-followers, whom Barna would consider "evangelical."
- Social outcome: Our practical goal is to focus on the breakdown of family and relational health in the region so that selected societal trends are addressed collectively in different regions.

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<sup>268</sup> Pier, *A Disruptive Gospel*, 22.

- Cultural outcome: Our practical goal is to focus on education as the key to securing the future for the next generation so that failing schools are turned around and literacy levels rise in the region.<sup>269</sup>

As these GCM leaders exemplify, missional collaboration toward common outcomes involves a way of thinking and operating that may require a mindset shift for pastors and leaders. Business strategist, Jim Collins explains the basic contours of outcome based thinking:

What matters is that you rigorously assemble evidence – quantitative or qualitative – to track your progress. If the evidence is primarily qualitative, think like a trial lawyer assembling the combined body of evidence. If the evidence is primarily quantitative, then think of yourself as a laboratory scientist assembling and assessing the data.<sup>270</sup>

Just as variegated activities can work together toward achieving common outcomes, there are also differing organizational structures of GCMs that can work together to accomplish larger results. In Center Church, Keller uses three concentric circles to illustrate a movement's penetration into a city:

- (1) Inner: A contextualized theological vision that brings coherence to the common evangelical stakeholders.
- (2) Middle: A church planting and renewal movement that is reaching unchurched diverse peoples.

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<sup>269</sup> Platt, "Church Unity, Where Do We Go from Here?"  
<https://www.goodnewsfl.org/church-unity-go/>, accessed September 25, 2018.

<sup>270</sup> Jim Collins, *Good to Great in the Social Sectors: A Monograph to Accompany Good to Great* (New York, Harper Collins, 2005), 7.



(3) Outer: Specialized ministries targeted to the diverse spiritual, cultural and social needs of the city.<sup>271</sup>

### *Empowerment of the Laity*

The fourth major characteristic observable in emerging GCMs is the empowerment of the laity. GCM leaders are recovering and championing the idea of vocation, namely that virtually all forms of work can be done for the glory of God and the public good. What this implies is that people who are not necessarily engaged in vocational ministry or acting as ministry volunteers, can nevertheless still be intrinsically involved in the gospel movement through the work that they do and the ways in which they do their jobs. Keller captures the essence of vocation and its connection to empowering the laity when he writes that, “therefore Christians glorify God not only through the ministry of the Word, but also through their vocations of agriculture, art, business, government, scholarship—all for God’s glory and the furtherance of the public good. Too many Christians have learned to seal off their faith-beliefs from the way they work in their vocation.”<sup>272</sup>

The need to recover a thicker perspective of Christian vocation is a push back on otherwise theologically and operationally narrow views toward work, industry, and business that the Church has held. Diminished views toward work have marginalized and sometimes fragmented the faith of Christian laity, thereby weakening the overall

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<sup>271</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 375.

<sup>272</sup> Carson and Keller, *The Gospel as Center*, 285.

influence of the gospel. Newbigin explained the inner workings of this idea by noting that:

It is, of course, also true that individual Christians will be weakened in their efforts to live out the gospel in secular engagements if what they are doing does not have the support of the Church as a whole. There is a reciprocal relationship between official pronouncements and individual commitment. It has to be said, I think, that in recent years there has been a widely perceived disjunction between official pronouncements and individual commitment, and it is important to stress the fact that the former without the latter are ineffective.<sup>273</sup>

Gospel city movements are thus seeking to recover a more biblical and robust view of vocation, in order to empower the laity and thereby strengthen the witness of the gospel. As James Hunter has argued that, “cultural change at its most profound level occurs through dense networks of elites operating in common purpose within institutions at the high-prestige centers of cultural production.”<sup>274</sup> This view accords with Newbigin’s assessment on the potential impact that the Christian congregation can have on public life:

Much of the vitality which was imparted to the early organs of ecumenical action was due to the fact that professional ecclesiastics were balanced by a goodly sprinkling of highly competent laypersons from business, government, and the professions. And yet I confess that I have come to feel that the primary reality of which we have to take account in seeking for a Christian impact on public life is the Christian congregation.<sup>275</sup>

By appreciating a broader and more elevated theology of work, Christians who are sprinkled throughout various forms of vocation can be incorporated and empowered for ministry in their cities.

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<sup>273</sup> Weston, *Lesslie Newbigin, Missionary Theologian*, 155.

<sup>274</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 274.

<sup>275</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227.

## **Summary of Gospel City Movements**

This section has investigated the relevant literature of GCMs by studying their historical antecedents and developments, their recent theological and practical underpinnings, and their presently shared core characteristics. By considering the broader historical flow of the Church's history, we can appreciate how the Church has constantly changed its forms and renewed its methods with respect to how it understands and relates to itself and to a continually changing world to which it is called. This theme was traced from the New Testament to the forming of America, through the Great Awakenings, American revivals of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the emergence of the Social Gospel Movement, 20<sup>th</sup> century revivals, and the 20<sup>th</sup> century developments of Fundamentalism, Liberalism, and Pentecostalism. Building on the forerunning work of Carl Henry, who sought to reconcile a middle space within the fissure of 20<sup>th</sup> century Fundamentalism and Liberalism, Bakke and Keller have become pioneering thought leaders of present-day GCMs. Their foundational thinking provides a theological framework and ministry philosophy for GCMs, including (1) the Gospel as common orthodoxy, (2) the city as a contextual and cultural ministry context, and (3) movement as a common cause for the church at large to work for the common good. Four major emerging characteristics of GCMs are discernable from the literature: local orientation, Church unity, missional collaboration, and empowerment of the laity. Local orientation can be accounted for in light of the dynamics of the uniqueness of major cities combined with shifts in North American ecclesiology. Church unity includes the primary elements of relationship, prayer, and missional activity; which work together to build and reinforce unity. Missional collaboration can be delineated more specifically in terms of common

witness, common good, common voice, and common outcomes. Finally, empowerment of the laity is exemplified through the thought recovery of vocation and the practical incorporating and empowering of Christians throughout various forms of industry in order to strengthen the witness of the gospel in the city.

In addition to the foregrounding literature review on GCMs that is used anchor and organize this research project, this study also incorporates relevant insights from the social science domain of collective impact. Sociology can play a generative role in helping tune our missiological perspectives and methods of engagement. Given the relatively recent uprising of GCMs and their proclivity to focus on complex social needs, GCMs might benefit from a more systematic and proven approach to collaboration. Collective impact, arising in the secular, social arena, may offer a useful organizing framework. The conceptual overlap between several of the conditions of CI and the key features of GCMs suggests good potential for theoretical and operational synergy. Furthermore, there is also recent precedence for utilizing CI in certain missiological contexts. In their extensively documented whitepaper, *Roadmap to Eradicate Bible Poverty*, Every Tribe Every Nation describes a partnership-driven model that is aggressively pursuing the translation of Scripture into every language by 2033.<sup>276</sup> This worthy and ambitious vision has incorporated CI as a philosophical driver and organizational shaper, as multiple participating organizations and actors are being brought together around the common agenda of Scripture translation. The paradigm of

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<sup>276</sup> Calvin Edwards and Company, *Roadmap to Eradicate Bible Poverty: A Partnership-Driven Model to Translate Scripture into Every Language by 2033*. (Oklahoma City, OK: Every Tribe Every Nation, 2017), 1.

CI is influencing how the large-scale need of Scripture translation can be advanced more widely and rapidly. By exploring the utility of CI for GCMs, there might additional insights generated into the defining core features of GCMs as well as what leads to their sustainability and effectiveness in reaching their goals. Therefore, the following section reviews the relevant literature on CI.

### **Review of Relevant Literature on Collective Impact**

Collective impact was first introduced in 2011, by John Kania, Managing Director at FSG: Reimagining Social Change, and Mark Kramer, Kennedy School at Harvard.<sup>277</sup> As a distinct organizational model, the evolution of CI has precipitated out of a need for enhanced constructs and methodologies to more effectively address diverse social problems that are inherently large and complex. Various sociocultural vectors in the 21<sup>st</sup> century U.S. have contributed to the proliferation of multilayered social problems, such as the need to improve environmental quality, advance educational reform, or recover children's overall health. These kinds of social issues are best understood as "adaptive problems," rather than "technical problems."<sup>278</sup> Social problems that are technical in nature tend to be characterized by having the problem itself well defined, having the answer already known in advance, and only needing one or a few organizations to produce adequate solutions. In contrast, adaptive problems tend to be more multifaceted

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<sup>277</sup> John Kania and Mark Kramer, "Collective Impact," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 9, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 36-41

<sup>278</sup> John Kania and Ron Heifetz, "Leading Boldly," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Winter 2004): 5-7.

and laden with complexity, where the answer is unknown and no single organization has the resources and skill needed to bring substantive impact. Accordingly, CI has emerged as a more comprehensive and versatile model to impact adaptive social issues.<sup>279</sup>

### **Collective Impact versus Isolated Impact**

As an organizational model for social change, CI stands in fundamental contrast to historically conventional approaches that can be referred to as “isolated impact.” The basic strategy of isolated impact is to fund and leverage single organizations attempt to influence social problems. In their groundbreaking article, *Collective Impact*, Kania and Kramer argue that while there is little evidence to support the effectiveness of isolated impact over against CI, it is still the most popular and widely used approach.<sup>280</sup> These authors surmise that this desire to continue with the status quo is due to the fact that using a CI strategy requires significant time and money, while focusing on one piece of a system at a time may appear like an easier and more attainable.

As a simpler sociological strategy, isolated impact might make good sense if the problem at hand is technical in nature. However, if the problem is more adaptive in kind, then it is likely that a collective strategy is needed in order to achieve greater potential results that are more substantive, central, and systemic. In contrast, attempting to use isolated methods on adaptive problems runs the risk of achieving social change that is marginal, peripheral, and incremental. Within the CI system, a new approach of seeing

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<sup>279</sup> Kania and Kramer, “Collective Impact,” 38-39.

<sup>280</sup> Kania and Kramer, “Collective Impact,” 38-39.

the same problem through different organizational lenses, continuously learning together, and constantly realigning efforts – help to combine intentional outcomes with emergent solutions.<sup>281</sup> For adaptive problems, large-scale social change requires CI. Multiplied efforts of isolated impact will not suffice. At best, they only generate micro-solutions to complex issues.<sup>282</sup> The difference between isolated impact and CI is demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Distinguishing Isolated Impact and Collective Impact

Isolated Impact	Collective Impact
Funders select individual grantees that offer the most promising solutions.	Funders and implementers understand that social problems and solutions arise from the interaction of many organizations.
Nonprofits work separately and compete to produce the greatest independent impact.	Progress depends on working toward the same goal and measuring the same things.
Evaluation attempts to isolate a particular organization's impact.	Large scale impact depends on increasing cross-sector alignment and learning among many organizations.
Large scale change is assumed to depend on scaling a single organization.	Corporate and government sectors are essential partners.
Corporate and government sectors are often disconnected from the efforts of foundations and nonprofits.	Organizations actively coordinate their action and share lessons learned

*Source:* John Kania and Mark Kramer, “Embracing Emergence: How Collective Impact Addresses Complexity,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, (January 21, 2013), 1-4.

<sup>281</sup> John Kania and Mark Kramer, “Embracing Emergence: How Collective Impact Addresses Complexity,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, (January 21, 2013): 1-4.

<sup>282</sup> Liz Weaver, “Possible: Transformational Change in Collective Impact,” *Community Development* 47, no. 2 (2016): 274-283.

## Collective Impact versus Traditional Collaboration

While CI includes certain germane features of collaboration, recent literature has also underscored noteworthy differences between CI and traditional forms of organizational collaboration. Collective impact subsumes yet extends traditionally practiced collaboration. The difference between CI and traditional collaboration is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Distinguishing Traditional Collaboration and Collective Impact

Traditional Collaboration	Collective Impact
Convene around programs and initiatives	Work together to achieve specific outcomes
Use data to “prove” the worth of a program	Use data to continuously “improve” the effectiveness of a program
An addition to what one already does in normal workflow	Integral to what one does in normal workflow
Advocate for ideas	Advocate for practices

*Source:* Jeff Edmonson, “The Difference Between Collaboration and Collective Impact,” Strivetogether.org. <https://www.strivetogether.org/blog/2012/11/the-difference-between-collaboration-and-collective-impact/>, accessed February 8, 2017.

Another way that CI can be further differentiated from organizational collaboration is by noting how it broadens collaboration by including civic leaders and developing new civic infrastructures and problem-solving processes.<sup>283</sup> Kania and

<sup>283</sup> Jeff Edmondson and Nancy L. Zimpher, “The New Civic Infrastructure: The ‘How To’ of Collective Impact and Getting a Better Investment,” *Community Investments* 24, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 11-12.



Kramer outline four distinct types of traditional organizational collaboration that have been used historically to address social problems:<sup>284</sup>

1. *Funder Collaboratives*: Groups of funders that support the same issue and tend to pool their resources. Generally, participants do not develop a shared measure system nor engage stakeholders from other sectors.
2. *Public-Private Partnerships*: Partnerships formed between government and private sector organizations to deliver specific services or benefits. The issues and solutions are often targeted narrowly (i.e., a specific drug for a single disease), and the full set of stakeholders connected to the issues are not engaged.
3. *Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives*: Programs that focus on a common theme and incorporate stakeholders from different sectors; but typically lack shared measurements and a supporting infrastructure to foster deep alignment of efforts and accountability of results.
4. *Social Sector Networks*: Groups of individuals or organizations connected through purposeful relationships. Collaboration is often ad hoc, with emphasis placed on information sharing and targeting short-term actions, rather than on sustaining a structured initiative.

While each of these different expressions of collaboration may merit suitability with respect to particular social problems, the constituents and methodology of CI nevertheless stand as unique and represent a relatively new construct of collaboration for

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<sup>284</sup> Kania and Kramer, “Collective Impact,” 39.

social innovation. Distinctly, CI is thus defined as the “long-term commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem, using a structured form of collaboration.”<sup>285</sup> Therefore, while CI shares certain common theoretical and procedural underpinnings with traditional forms of collaboration, Weaver also concurs that “there is something different, unique, and challenging about collective impact.”<sup>286</sup> In summary, CI is distinct from traditional collaboration, representing a more disciplined, systematic, and higher performing approach to achieving large scale social impact.

### **The Five Conditions of Collective Impact**

As an organizational system, CI incorporates five core conditions, that when taken together, encourage deeper organizational alignment that can lead to more powerful outcomes. These five conditions include: (1) a common agenda, (2) shared measurement system, (3) mutually reinforcing activities, (4) continuous communication, and (5) a backbone organization. Combined together, these components enable participating organizations to collaborate in generative ways that increase their understanding into the complexities of the social problem and encourage cross-sector coalitions in applying emergent solutions.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Kania and Kramer, “Collective Impact,” 36.

<sup>286</sup> Liz Weaver, “The Promise and Peril of Collective Impact,” *The Philanthropist* 26, no. 1 (2014): 11.

<sup>287</sup> Norman Walzer, Liz Weaver, and Catherine McGuire, “Collective Impact Approaches and Community Development Issues,” *Community Development* 47, no. 2 (2016): 161.

## *A Common Agenda*

A common agenda is defined by all participants as having a shared vision for social change that includes a common understanding of the problem and an agreed upon approach and activities for solving the problem.<sup>288</sup> Whatever the participating organizations may be (i.e., government, private business, or non-profit), there must be alignment around a common agenda of vision and strategy. The common agenda functions as a uniting force to propel concerted efforts. Without a common agenda, organizations may believe they are working on the same things while in reality underlying differences can exist concerning the nature of the problem and the goals for the project. These differences inevitably surface over time, in the forms of competing trajectories of efforts and activities, which can then lead to the splintering off of involved organizations. Using a CI approach involves discussing and resolving these types of divergences early on in the collaborative process. The main idea is that the shared goals for the CI initiative need to have consensus buy in from participating organizations, even if there is not unanimity with respect to all dimensions and nuances of the problem.

There are two important steps involved in setting a common agenda: (1) identifying the boundaries of the issue to be addressed, and (2) developing a strategic framework to guide the activities of the initiative. Boundaries for collective initiatives are often flexibly defined, yet still enable greater clarity of focus by delimiting the nature, scope, geography, and other variables of the problem. Strategic frameworks include several important components, such as: accurate descriptions of the problem informed by

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<sup>288</sup> Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer, “Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (January 26, 2012), 8-9.

reliable research, clear impact goals, guiding principles for the groups' efforts, a portfolio of strategies to drive large-scale change, and an approach to evaluation that forecasts and anticipates how the CI initiative will receive feedback for its efforts. The portfolio of strategies might include a combination of short-term and long-term goals and strategies. More attainable short-term goals help provide a sense of early wins that can generate momentum for the initiative, which can then be followed by deeper and more systemic long-term strategies that may take years to achieve impactful fruition. Strategic frameworks are also dynamic rather than static, and need continuously updated.<sup>289</sup>

### *Shared Measurement System*

Using a shared measurement system refers to having agreed upon ways that results will be measured and reported. Consistent measures are used to monitor performance, track progress toward goals, and learn what is or what is not working.<sup>290</sup> Collaborative efforts tend toward shallowness without shared measurements. By implementing a shared measurement system, organizations working together can speak a common language, which enables greater organizational alignment, and can lead toward more productive collaborative work that ultimately results in greater effectiveness. Shared measurement systems also include a list of key indicators that are known and used across all participating organizations. This helps ensure greater consistency in efforts,

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<sup>289</sup> Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer, "Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work," 8-10.

<sup>290</sup> Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer, "Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work," 10-12.

which reinforces alignment between stakeholders. The development of shared measuring systems also functions as a structural precursor to accountability.

### *Mutually Reinforcing Activities*

Employing mutually reinforcing activities includes coordinating a set of differentiated activities through a conjoined plan of action.<sup>291</sup> These coordinated efforts are thus fit into a larger concerted plan. In operationalizing this core condition, it is not that all organizations do the same thing. Rather, each organization is encouraged to focus on the specific areas of engagement within their respective range of expertise and potential contribution, albeit with an understanding that activities are coordinated within the overarching and reinforcing approach to the problem.<sup>292</sup>

### *Continuous Communication*

Continuous communication refers to the consistent and open communication over time among key participants within and across contributing organizations. This kind of intentional, ongoing communication helps to build trust and informs progressive learning and tactical adaptation of strategy.<sup>293</sup> Intentionally and relationally participating in

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<sup>291</sup> Kania and Kramer, “Collective Impact,” 40.

<sup>292</sup> Kania and Kramer, “Collective Impact,” 40.

<sup>293</sup> Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer, “Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work,” 15-16.

continuous communication enables participants to move toward higher levels of collaboration, which can be summarized in the following critical concepts.<sup>294</sup>

- Networking: Awareness of organization; roles are loosely defined; little communication; decisions are made independently.
- Cooperation: Information is provided to each other; roles are somewhat defined; formal communication; decisions are made independently.
- Coordination: Information and resources are shared; roles are defined; frequent communication; decisions are sometimes shared.
- Coalition: Ideas and resources are shared; communication is frequent and prioritized; all members have a vote in decision-making.
- Collaboration: Members belong to one system; communication is frequent and characterized by mutual trust; consensus is reached on all decisions.

In their study on impact facilitators and collaboration, Gillam, Counts, and Garstka found established informal relationships to be the only variable that predicted collaboration.<sup>295</sup> Informal relationships provide the communicative bridges for difficult conversations, as they create a sense of shared purpose and supply necessary anchoring for inevitable storms of uncertainty.<sup>296</sup> Kania and Kramer also point out that developing

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<sup>294</sup> Bruce B. Frey, Jill H. Lohmeier, Stephen W. Lee, and Nona Tollefson, "Measuring Collaboration Among Grant Partners," *American Journal of Evaluation* 27, no. 3 (2006): 385-392.

<sup>295</sup> Rebecca J. Gillam, Jacqueline M. Counts, and Teri A. Garstka, "Collective Impact Facilitators: How Contextual and Procedural Factors Influence Collaboration," *Community Development* 47, no. 2 (2016): 220

<sup>296</sup> John Kania, Frey Hanleybrown, and Jennifer Splansky Juster, "Essential Mindset Shifts for Collective Impact," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Fall 2014): 4-5.

deeper levels of trust may take several years of regular interaction, to allow organizations to recognize and appreciate the collective dynamic of working together.<sup>297</sup>

### *Backbone Organization*

Collective impact requires ongoing support by an independent staff dedicated to serving and managing the initiative. Backbone organizations help to coordinate the actions of all the participating organizations involved in the CI program.<sup>298</sup> Since many of the members within a CI partnership serve as leaders in their own organizations, a staffed backbone organization provides the administrative support that allows participants to focus on strategic leadership activities. The backbone function provides regular progress assessments of the subsidiary workgroups and synthesizes the results to ensure that the common agenda is consistently supported.<sup>299</sup> The backbone organization thus serves as a neutral, coordinated entity that convenes participants, manages activities, maintains accountability, and facilitates establishing independent organizational ownership for the collective project.<sup>300</sup>

Backbone organizations pursue six essential activities to support and facilitate CI: (1) providing overall strategic direction, (2) facilitating conversations between partners,

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<sup>297</sup> Kania and Kramer, “Collective Impact,” 40.

<sup>298</sup> Kania and Kramer, “Collective Impact,” 40.

<sup>299</sup> Hallie Preskill, Marcie Parkhurst, and Splansky-Juster, Jennifer. “Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact.” FSG.org. <https://www.fsg.org/publications/guide-evaluating-collective-impact>, accessed March 13, 2017.

<sup>300</sup> Kania and Kramer, “Collective Impact,” 40.

(3) managing data collection and analysis, (4) processing communications, (5) coordinating community outreach efforts, and (6) mobilizing funding.<sup>301</sup> Backbone organizations can take on a variety of different organizational structures. However, there are discernable principles for success, along with general challenges, which backbone organizations must face. Successful backbone organizations are contextual-situational-specific, are able to secure adequate funding, and mobilize stakeholders. The difficulty for backbone organizations is that they must be led by strong adaptive leadership that can simultaneously mobilize people without imposing a predetermined path or take credit for success. Backbone organizations thus find themselves in the delicate space of balancing strong leadership needed to rally and retain broad engagement, while at the same time functioning somewhat invisibly behind the scenes so that other stakeholders can genuinely buy into the initiative's success.<sup>302</sup>

In CI initiatives, backbone organizations interact with an oversight group and working groups through what has been called “cascading levels of collaboration.”<sup>303</sup> The oversight group is often called a Steering Committee or Executive Committee, and includes key cross-sector representatives and CEO-level leaders from organizations who

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<sup>301</sup> Shiloh Turner, Kathy Merchant, John Kania, and Ellen Martin, “Understanding the Value of Backbone Organizations in Collective Impact: Part 2,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (July 18, 2012): 2-4.

<sup>302</sup> Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer, “Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work,” 14-18.

<sup>303</sup> Hallie Preskill, Marcie Parkhurst, and Jennifer Splansky Juster, “Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact Part 1: Learning and evaluation in the collective impact context.” FSG.org. <https://www.fsg.org/publications/guide-evaluating-collective-impact>, accessed March 13, 2017.



are engaged in the issues at hand. Working groups are arranged within the CI program, to focus on developing action plans and specific shared measures. The working groups share data, and communicate about challenges, opportunities, and progress toward goals.<sup>304</sup>

### **The Preconditions and Phases of Collective Impact**

Three preconditions are needed to adequately launch a CI initiative: (1) an influential champion, (2) adequate financial resources, and (3) a sense of urgency for change.<sup>305</sup> Taken together, these three prerequisites create the early inspiration and motivation necessary to rally diverse organizations and members together.

First, an influential champion (or small group of champions) who commands respect is initially required to bring together CEO-level leaders from across different sectors to focus on the social problem. Along with being a dynamic leader, it is important that the champion be both passionately focused on solving the problem, while also being open-handed with their particular view and willing to let other participants bring their own perspective to bear on the issue. Second, financial resources are generally needed for the first two or three years of the project. Start-up initiatives have typically been initially financed by an anchor funder who can provide resources to establish the needed infrastructure and mobilize the early planning processes. Third,

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<sup>304</sup> Preskill, Parkhurst, and Splansky Juster, “Guide to Evaluating Collective Impact Part 1,” <https://www.fsg.org/publications/guide-evaluating-collective-impact>, accessed March 13, 2017

<sup>305</sup> Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer, “Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work,” 5-7.

there must be urgency for change with respect to the given social issue. This earnestness could be precipitated by factors such as a perceived social breaking point, the emergence of special funding, a breakthrough of new knowledge, or a widespread publicizing of the problem.<sup>306</sup>

With respect to community development and transformation, Weaver also outlines six additional conditions that are needed to orient and move towards transformational social change through CI.<sup>307</sup>

1. Systems leadership: System leaders are able to focus on the health of the entire system. They have the capacity to see and comprehend the problem from both the micro and macro perspectives:
2. Embrace a framework: A systems matrix provides a container for testing and prototyping system changes.
3. Assess community readiness: All pertaining sectors of the community need to believe in the need for change and embrace their individual and collective contributions toward this change.
4. Focus on data and measurement: Establish and maintain consistent focus on reliable data to inform the problem, and identify and track measures that lead to outcomes.
5. Communicate and engage: Establish consistent forms of communication to encourage persistent and deep engagement.

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<sup>306</sup> Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer, “Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work,” 5-7.

<sup>307</sup> Weaver, “Possible: Transformational Change in Collective Impact,” 275-282.

6. Ask what is next: Cultivate continuous and generative learning with respect to the future that can be implemented into the work.

After these preconditions are in place there are three distinct phases involved in beginning and sustaining a CI initiative. These three phases are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3. Three Phases of Collective Impact

Components for Success	Phase I: Initiate Action	Phase II: Organize for Impact	Phase III: Sustain Action and Impact
Governance and Infrastructure	Identify champions and form cross-sector group	Create infrastructure	Facilitate and refine
Strategic Planning	Map the landscape and use data to make case	Create common agenda	Support implementation
Community Involvement	Facilitate community outreach	Engage community and build stronger public will	Continue engagement and conduct advocacy
Evaluation and Improvement	Analyze baseline data to identify key issues and gaps	Establish shared metrics	Collect, track, and report progress

*Source:* Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer, “Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work,” 5-8.

Phase one focuses on initiating action. The key tasks of this first phase include understanding who the key players are, and what work is already being done. From inception, it is imperative for new CI initiatives to honor prior efforts and involved organizations and build upon the seeds of their work. It is also important to gather reliable data on the social problem and formulate initial governing structures for managing decisions and workflow. Phase two centers on organizing for impact. The main activities for this phase include establishing and aligning around common goals, identifying shared measures, and creating a backbone organization. The first two phases

often take between six months and two years. Phase three aims at sustaining action and impact. This getting-the-work-done phase involves pursuing prioritized action areas in coordinated ways, collecting data and utilizing shared measures to track progress, and actively adjusting and re-aligning to reach common goals. Phase three can last ten years or more.

### **Application of Collective Impact for Social Innovation**

Collective impact initiatives have been employed in a wide array of social issues. There are several noteworthy illustrations of CI initiatives that have been looked to as exemplar cases. The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) has helped reduce nutritional deficiencies for 530 million impoverished people in the world.<sup>308</sup> In Memphis, Tennessee, Memphis Fast Forward helped to reduce violent crime and create more than 14,000 new jobs.<sup>309</sup> The Calgary Homeless Foundation facilitated housing for over 3,300 people to help curb what had been the fastest growing homelessness rate in Canada. The remarkable connection linking effective impact in these diverse social problems is not attributed to these initiatives introducing new interventions or scaling up a previously established high-performing organization. Rather, despite dramatic

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<sup>308</sup> Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, “Stanford Social Innovation Review Features GAIN for Collective Impact,” February 13, 2014, <https://www.gainhealth.org/knowledge-centre/stanford-social-innovation-review-features-gain-collective-impact/>, accessed November 20, 2018.

<sup>309</sup> FSG Reimagining Social Change, “Memphis Fast Forward: A Collective Impact Study,” FSG Reimagining Social Change, 2017, <https://www.fsg.org/publications/memphis-fast-forward>, accessed November 20, 2018.

differences in kind and scope, these diverse efforts have succeeded by using a CI approach.<sup>310</sup> This diversity of impact demonstrates the versatility of CI as an organizational model and methodology.

### **Summary of Collective Impact**

As an organizational model for social transformation, CI has contributed to sustained improvements and is rapidly gaining use around the world to address large-scale adaptive social problems.<sup>311</sup> Various models of CI initiatives have been employed in a wide array of social issues, which demonstrates the versatility of CI as an organizational model and methodology for social impact. The CI model demonstrates fruitful potential for providing an overall framework and organizational tools within that structure, to possibly inform, organize, catalyze, and sustain GCMs.

### **Literature Review Conclusion**

In order to better understand the core identity of current largescale GCMs in the U.S., and to consider the potential applicability and usefulness of the CI model to inform and shape them, this chapter reviewed the relevant literature of the two domains of GCMs and CI. The ensuing literature review generated several productive insights that ground the present research project.

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<sup>310</sup> Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer, “Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work,” 1.

<sup>311</sup> Walzer, Weaver, and McGuire, “Collective Impact Approaches and Community Development Issues,” 165.

A deeper understanding of contemporary GCMs was yielded by tracing their historical antecedents and precursors from the New Testament and throughout church history, which have shaped the thinking and aspirations resonant in present day GCM formulations. As a living system, the church has always existed in constantly changing historical forms. Relatedness between church communities has always been integral to the form in which the church expresses itself. There have always been movements of renewal and revitalization throughout church history. This chapter specifically reviewed distinct periods of renewal and reformation from the New Testament to the forming of America, through the Great Awakenings, American revivals of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the emergence of the Social Gospel Movement, 20<sup>th</sup> century revivals, and the 20<sup>th</sup> century developments of Fundamentalism, Liberalism, and Pentecostalism. By considering GCMs through this historical vantage point, this review demonstrated how throughout its history the Church has developed acclimated responses that have given rise to new and unique ecclesial forms relevant to the particular sociocultural milieu in which the church has existed within society.

Ray Bakke and Tim Keller have become pioneering thought leaders who have shaped the recent theological and practical underpinnings of GCMs. Their thinking has helped frame the definitional contours of how GCMs see themselves and seek to relate to themselves and to their respective cities. While each GCM seems to embody a unique history and context in its particular city, there are still major features of objective commonality that are core to all GCMs. There were four core characteristics of GCMs that were explored in this study: (1) local orientation, (2) Church unity, (3) missional collaboration, and (4) empowerment of the laity.

Local orientation stands out as a central characteristic of GCMs for two primary reasons: (1) the uniqueness of major cities, and (2) recent dramatic shifts in North American ecclesiology. Rapid urbanization in our contemporary global era has heightened the need to appreciate the uniqueness of cities. The cities of today also take on distinct senses of individuality, producing a heterogeneous affect that requires the Church in every city to develop localized responses relevant to their contexts. The uniqueness of cities, especially in their present-day socio-cultural realities, accentuates the need for a contextualized urban response by the Church. This is one primary reason why local orientation stands out as a central characteristic of contemporary GCMs. North American ecclesiology has also been undergoing significant shifts toward post-denominationalism, making both the proliferation of GCMs themselves more feasible and further driving their orientation toward local engagement within their cities. These new ecclesial forms have been driven by important social underpinnings (i.e., social mobility, consumerism, and urbanization). Locally engaged GCMs appear to be a demonstrative expression of the Church in post-denominationalism.

A plea for church unity is also central to GCMs core identity and mission. This study highlights three critical factors of unity resonant in contemporary GCMs: relationship, prayer, and missional activity. The focus on relationship is a primary element in GCMs that helps to build and reinforce church unity. Cultivating intentional relationships with one another has special significance when considered in light of the broad social-cultural changes expressly borne out in city life. Furthermore, GCM leaders have championed the call to relational diversity and building relational trust across theological, ecclesial, economic, cultural and racial lines. The priority of prayer is

another essential dynamic in GCMs that is seen as correlating with the development of church unity. The expression of increased united prayer has concurrently grown with the proliferation of GCMs over the past 25 years. The priorities of building intentional relationships and practicing united prayer inherently lead to partnering together in missional activity.

Missional collaboration involves a “mission” that is influenced by the uniqueness of the city, and by a “collaboration” that is marked by genuine unity over against a shallow version of uniformity. As such, missional collaboration was discussed in terms of the categories of common witness, common good, common voice, and common outcomes. The idea of common witness refers mainly to the “spiritual” domain, but encapsulates both a broader view of the church along with a more holistic view of the gospel. Common witness thus goes beyond the prior conversionist attitudes of fundamentalist evangelicalism in an effort to impact 21<sup>st</sup> century cities. The notion of common good signifies how present-day GCMs are working hard to present a more holistic understanding and approach to gospel ministry by seeking to engage more fully with the realities they face in their cities, especially with reference to social causes. The element of common voice includes the cultural domain, and the call for the Church to engage in spheres of cultural influence. Finally, common outcomes refers to the building of unified, measurable, and effective results that relate to the spiritual, social, and cultural domains.

Empowerment of the laity includes a recovery and championing vision for the idea of vocation, which celebrates virtually all forms of work as for God’s glory and the



public's good. In recovering a more biblical view of vocation, GCM leaders are empowering laity to use their work as a station and platform for the gospel.

Collective impact has emerged out of a need for enhanced constructs and methodologies, to more effectively address diverse social problems that are inherently large and complex. Collective impact offers a distinct and more robust organizational model than historical models of isolated impact and traditional collaboration. There are five pillars that comprise the CI model: (1) a common agenda, (2) shared measurement system, (3) mutually reinforcing activities, (4) continuous communication, and (5) a backbone organization. Collective impact also includes three preconditions (an influential champion, adequate financial resources, and a sense of urgency for change) and three phases (initiate action, organize for impact, and sustain action and impact).

This literature review has consolidated significant insights about GCMs, with respect to their historical antecedents and developments, their recent theological and practical underpinnings, and their emerging core characteristics. However, there are still a number of questions that relate to what has been surveyed in the literature but call for further exploration. While GCMs are rising across the country, they seem to exist more organically and distinctively city by city rather than through models of shared practice. Little if any actual formal research exists on the common features that define these movements and distinguish them from similar current or historical church expressions. Clarifying the core identity of large U.S. GCMs, using the four features identified in this chapter as a starting point, might serve as a valuable foundation for future research and practice around GCMs. Additionally, GCMs might benefit from considering the potential applicability of the CI model to help inform and shape them. These questions

will be addressed by this research project, which aims to clarify the common identity and unique expressions of current largescale GCMs, along with the perceived applicability and usefulness of the CI model to help inform their operations.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **PROJECT DESIGN**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the common identity and unique expressions of current largescale gospel city movements (GCMs) in the U.S. To pursue this research question, this study specifically investigated the shared features of current largescale GCMs in the U.S. with regard to a unifying agenda and goals, as well as processes and measures. As a secondary objective, this study also explored the perceived applicability and usefulness of the collective impact (CI) model to current GCMs in the U.S. This research project was exploratory in nature, and utilized a qualitative phenomenological research approach in order to capture the emic perspectives of seven largescale GCMs in the U.S. through the vantage points of their respective executive leaders' experiences, thoughts, and beliefs with respect to the research question. This chapter is intended to demonstrate the research principles, logistical methods, and procedural steps that were employed in this project.

## Statement of Research Question

There were two aspects of this research project, which were delineated in the following respective major and minor research questions:

1. What are the shared features as well as the unique expressions of GCMs in the U.S. with regard to a unifying agenda and goals as well as processes and measures?
2. What is the perceived applicability and usefulness of the CI model to current largescale city movements?

## Research Design

In view of the exploratory nature of the research project, along with the relevantly recent uprising of GCMs,<sup>1</sup> it was most appropriate for this study to utilize a qualitative research design. Qualitative research design enables a researcher's access into participants' perceptions and experiences, by taking into account their relevant context and insider perspective.<sup>2</sup> These valuable features of qualitative research aligned well with the objectives of this study. The project used a phenomenological research approach as its primary method of inquiry. Phenomenology seeks to describe "the world as it appears to individuals when they lay aside the prevailing understandings of those

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Keller, Tim Chester, Daniel Montgomery, Mike Cosper, and Alan Hirsch, *Serving a Movement: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 368.

<sup>2</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 155.

phenomena and revisit their immediate experience of the phenomena.”<sup>3</sup> Insights into the research question were generated from participants themselves who were experienced executive leaders of specific GCMs that were investigated in this study. Given this rationale, it was therefore fitting that a qualitative phenomenological research design be used for this study.

### **Data Verification**

Conducting phenomenological qualitative research requires the consideration of principled standards and quality control for data verification. The entire research process must attend to these considerations to ensure that the tasks of data collection, analysis, and the reporting of research findings are conducted in a careful, thorough, and replicable manner. John Creswell suggests that in order to maintain credible levels of validity and reliability in qualitative research, at least two of the eight recommended data verification processes should be applied: (1) prolonged engagement and persistent observation, (2) data triangulation, (3) peer review, (4) negative cases analysis, (5) clarification of researcher bias, (6) member checking, (7) rich, thick descriptions, and (8) external audits.<sup>4</sup> For this research study, the following verification procedures were used:

1. Rich, Thick Descriptions: To safeguard the trustworthiness of the results, the research findings include descriptive recordings that demonstrate the participants’ own voice and perceptions. In this way, readers of the research

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<sup>3</sup> Meredith D. Gall, Joyce P. Gall, and Walter R. Borg, *Educational Research: An Introduction*, 8th ed. (Boston, MA: Pearson Education Inc., 2007), 495.

<sup>4</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 207-209.

conclusions can confirm their accuracy.<sup>5</sup> The use of rich, thick descriptions through the demonstration of participants' own voice can be seen in the results and discussion sections of chapter five in this research study.

2. Clarification of Researcher Bias: The researchers that conducted the interviews, were not the same ones that conducted the primary data analysis. This process mitigated against potential researcher bias and enhanced the reliability of the study.

Several supplemental measures were also taken by the researcher to strengthen the reliability of this study.<sup>6</sup> For example, because of my personal presidential position at OneHope, and relationship with many of the GCM executive leaders, it was deemed necessary to exclude myself from the interviews so as to not bias the responses and reactions of the interviewees. A team of three OneHope researchers conducted the interviews. Additionally, the executive leaders who participated in the study were promised anonymity, which also helped to ensure unbiased responses. During the course of the interviews, the research team sought to build rapport with the participants in order to foster genuine and transparent interview responses. The research team also recorded a digital audio and video file of each interview and organized these files with correspondent verbatim transcriptions of the interviews so that each of these files could be collated with the individual participants. During data analysis, a fourth OneHope researcher who was not involved in the interviews conducted the primary data analysis.

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<sup>5</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 209.

<sup>6</sup> Anssi Perakyla, "Reliability and Validity in Research Based on Naturally Occurring Social Interaction," in *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. David Silverman (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 283-304.

This analysis was then checked and confirmed by the other three researchers. For the data analysis, the researcher became immersed in the transcribed interview data, and emerging concepts and themes in the data were coded by using the “QSR NVivo 10” qualitative research software. The codes were developed and kept in an organized spreadsheet to prevent any obfuscation or misidentification of the data.

### **Data Source Development**

There were two primary sources of data that were utilized in this research study: (1) secondary organizational research of each GCM, and (2) individual in-depth interviews (Appendix C).

### **Secondary Organizational Research**

The first source of data for this study included secondary organizational research. This research focused on respective GCM websites, articles, and youtube videos. By conducting this preliminary research a general layout of each GCMs history, leadership, unique expression, and strategic mission was discovered. This information was used to help the research team prepare and focus for each particular individual interview. Additionally, the secondary research providing a method of checking public expression of the GCM (including website, and relevant artifacts) against the lived experience discussed in the interview.

### **Individual In-Depth Interviews**

The second and main source of data for this study was individual in-depth interviews, which were semi-structured and followed an interview script (Appendix C).

Semi-structured interviews are useful because they help facilitate rapport and empathy, allow for more flexibility of coverage, and permit the interview to go into novel areas; thus producing potentially more fruitful data.<sup>7</sup>

The interview script for this study included three important characteristics: (1) open-ended questions with follow-up probes, (2) a structural/procedural plan, and (3) flexibility. First, open-ended questions are particularly useful in qualitative research because they represent one of the closest modes of comprehending a person's actual experiences.<sup>8</sup> Probes were used to gain further depth of clarity and specificity with regard to the participants' responses to the main questions, and to elucidate emerging concepts that arose during the course of the interviews (Patton, 2002). Second, the interview script included a purposeful structuring and a procedural plan for the content and ordering of questions and follow-up probes. The substance of the questions themselves were formulated and grouped according to the major concepts and themes resonant in the literature review and pertinent to the focus of the research study and primary research questions. The sequence of the questions in the interview script began with lighter, easier questions and moved progressively toward deeper inquiries. Third, rather than functioning as a mechanical template, the interview script was comprised with flexible adaptability to the personal context of each interview. Thus, while certain

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<sup>7</sup> Kathy Charmaz, "Grounded Theory," in *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*, ed. Jonathan A. Smith, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 59.

<sup>8</sup> Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, 3rd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006), 85.



follow-up probes were planned for in the interview script, some inquiries and probes inevitably and serendipitously arose through the course of the actual interviews.

### **Sample Selection Procedures**

This qualitative study employed a purposeful sample selection procedure in which particular GCMs were deliberately selected in order to provide relevant data with respect to the research questions.<sup>9</sup> The sample for this study consisted of seven largescale contemporary GCMs in the U.S. The following sections document the criteria and process that were used in this study for sample selection.

### **Criteria for Sample Selection**

Purposeful sampling selection refers to the selection of information-rich cases that are used for in-depth study.<sup>10</sup> The strategy of purposeful sampling also seeks to identify the sample selection in view of the participants' potential ability to generate insightful information that contributes to an evolving theory.<sup>11</sup> Based on this rationale, the following sample selection criteria were used to identify the research participants for this study.

The first selection criteria was that each participating GCM for this study was

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph A. Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012), 97.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 46.

<sup>11</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 158-165.

required to be listed in the Luis Palau Association database of GCMs.<sup>12</sup> This database contains a comprehensive listing of current U.S. cities where GCMs are being created and sustained. The participating GCMs for this study were selected out of a listing of 246 current GCMs in the U.S. Second, each potential GCM selected for this study was required to be located in a city of more than a million people. As discussed in the Chapter Three literature review, the context of this study focuses on the social milieu of large U.S. cities where the effects of urbanization, globalization, and pluralization are most acute. Third, this study sought to include cities from diverse regions in the U.S., including those from more church-ed regions with those from less church-ed regions. Fourth, the selection process was informed and validated by expert confirmation from the GCM national team – a strategic small group of movement coaches that help catalyze, train and guide GCMs. The GCM national team suggested and confirmed the participating GCMs in this study as best-in-class exemplars amongst current largescale GCMs in the U.S. Based on these criteria, the following seven GCMs were selected for this study:

- (1) Charlotte (For Charlotte)
- (2) Denver (City Unite)
- (3) New York City (Redeemer City to City)
- (4) Phoenix (Surge Network)
- (5) Portland (City Serve)
- (6) San Francisco Bay Area (Transform the Bay with Christ)

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<sup>12</sup> City Gospel Movements, “Celebrating Gospel Collaborative Work,” 2018, <https://gospelmovements.org/cities/>, accessed November 23, 2018.

(7) South Florida (Church United)

### **Process for Sample Selection**

The following sample selection process was used to identify the GCMs and executive movement leaders that participated in this study. First, to select the seven GCMs for this study, an initial list of GCMs was compiled and filtered by using the first two abovementioned criteria. From this list, a total of 10 GCMs were highlighted as prospective participants for the study. The list of 10 highlighted GCMs was then presented to the GCM national team to confirm: 1) which of the 10 GCMs were currently considered to be the most exemplary GCMs in the U.S., and 2) if any major model GCMs in the U.S. should be considered which may not have been represented on the initial list of 10 GCMs. From this expert consultation, the seven GCMs used in this study were confirmed. These seven respective GCMs were coded with the pseudonyms GCM-1 ... to GCM-7 in order to conserve their anonymity and protect the confidentiality of their leaders and members.

After the seven GCMs were selected, the executive leaders of each GCM were identified and contacted according to the following procedures. First, background organizational research was conducted on each GCM. This preliminary research helped to identify who the executive leaders were of each GCM. Second, after the executive leaders were identified for each respective GCM, the second procedural step was to email an initial Letter of Invitation to Research to the administrative assistant of each executive leader (Appendix A). Third, each executive leader responded voluntarily with interest in participating and contributing to the study. Fourth, an Informed Consent Form was sent

for review and signature to each executive leader who represented each of the seven GCMs. Finally, the research team coordinated with the respective administrative assistants for each GCM to secure a date and time for the individual in-depth interviews.

### *Description of Participating Gospel City Movements*

The participants for this study included seven major contemporary GCMs in the U.S. Based on secondary organizational research, a description of each of these GCMs is shown below.

#### Charlotte – For Charlotte

Approximately 150 of the 960 churches in the Mecklenburg County, NC area partner to form the For Charlotte Mission Network, a “gospel-centered network of churches in the Greater Charlotte area working together to seek the peace of the Queen City.”<sup>13</sup> The strategy of this network is four-fold, involving mission networks, mission platforms, mission resources, and mission gatherings. Networks form either as a result of personal connection through geographic proximity or shared desire to meet a specific local need. Similarly, mission platforms mobilize multiple networks of church and non-profit connections in order to meet needs that are present across the city. Mission resources and gatherings equip workers in the For Charlotte Mission Network through

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<sup>13</sup> For Charlotte, “About FORCLT,” ForCharlotte.org, <https://forcharlotte.org>, accessed January 14, 2019.

books, reports, conferences, and other events to uphold the values of the group in their efforts to meet the perceived needs of their city.

Rob Kelly currently serves the For Charlotte Mission Network as President and CEO on a board of eight members and a leadership team of thirty. He and his team work to instill the values of gospel-centrality, church-unity, and city-transformation in people living in the Greater Charlotte area in order to enable them to reach the mission network's focus areas for the gospel. These focus areas include anyone who is economically unstable, societally marginalized, or a Millennial, as well as people who are gifted in business and church multiplication who could potentially grow the movement. The oldest branch of the network still in existence began in 2016.

#### Denver – City Unite

In 2006, Dave Runyon began an initiative called “Building Blocks” in Denver, Colorado, around the simple concept of helping people get to know their eight closest neighbors. This movement that eventually grew to include 55 churches and 4,000 members. Due to its success, Runyon and Jay Pathak decided to build a similar initiative based in Arvada, Colorado, that gathered the leadership of 21 churches to mobilize their congregations to become familiar with their own neighbors. This movement has grown to include 1,000 churches.

The focus of Neighboring Movement in Colorado grew out of a meeting between Bob Frie, the mayor of Arvada, and a group of influential pastors in the area. The meeting was held in order to develop a strategy to address common issues in the community. Frie stated that many of the issues would disappear if citizens would love

their neighbors. After recovering from the initial shock of a plan so simple, the initiative was agreed upon and planning began. As a resource, “The Art of Neighboring” is now available for free on Neighboring Movement Colorado’s website, teaching people how to approach and form a support system with their neighbors, as well as organize and throw block parties to allow neighborhoods to become more cohesive and solve their own problems on a smaller, more manageable scale.<sup>14</sup>

#### New York City – Redeemer City to City

Founded in 2001 in New York City by Tim Keller, Redeemer City to City is a church planting movement focused on spreading gospel movements through community-centered church plants around the world. Pastors are trained for and coached through the church planting process and supported financially in order to cover the costs associated with getting a new church through the first few years of building a congregation. Due to the high concentration of the world’s people living in cities, the movement focuses specifically on urban areas to help church growth. Redeemer City to City has planted 495 churches in 70 cities.<sup>15</sup>

#### Phoenix – Surge Network

Tyler Johnson and Chris Gonzalez founded Surge in 2008 in Phoenix, Arizona. The original mission was to train leaders for the church to increase discipleship so that Christians would be better equipped to go into their communities with the love and

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<sup>14</sup> The Art of Neighboring, “About,” <https://www.artofneighboring.com/about/>, accessed January 14, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Redeemer City to City, “We Help Leaders Start Churches in Global Cities,” <https://www.redeemercitytocity.com/>, accessed January 14, 2019.

service of Christ. Pastors and lay leaders are trained in missions-based theology at Surge School, a 9-month, intensive leadership development program at Surge's ministry school and training center. They also offer seminars and shorter courses alongside their regular curriculum. In partnership with Redeemer Seminary, Surge has begun a seminary that offers a master's degree in missional theology. Pastors are trained to empower their congregations to take Christ into their workplaces, families, and neighborhoods.<sup>16</sup>

#### Portland – City Serve

City Serve Portland was founded in 2008 by Kevin Palau as an initiative to mobilize the body of Christ in Portland, Oregon. Church and business leaders met with Portland's mayor to ask the question, "What do you need and how can we help?" Continually, no matter the answer, meetings are held to strategize a solution and volunteers are gathered to meet the need. During the first round of meetings and service, 27,000 volunteers met to serve the citizens of Portland.

As the movement has grown, volunteer events are held year-round and service opportunities can address one of seven needs and initiatives in the city: the School Partnership Network, foster care, hunger and poverty, health and wellness, homelessness, street and gang violence, and human trafficking.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Surge Network, "A Movement of Local Churches," <https://surgenetwork.com/>, accessed January 14, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> City Serve Portland, "What is CityServe Portland?" <https://cityservepdx.org/>, accessed January 14, 2019.

## San Francisco Bay Area – Transforming the Bay with Christ

Transforming the Bay with Christ (TBC) is a grassroots initiative in the San Francisco Bay Area of California to form a partnership between schools and leaders in churches and businesses in order to perform services in the community. Business leaders develop strategic plans for change that churches can use to inform their community practices and avoid isolation. Churches “adopt” schools and ask what can be done to serve the school and surrounding community without asking for anything in return. CEO Nancy Ortberg leads a staff of 4, a cabinet of 8, and an advisory group of 25 pastors, entrepreneurs, and community leaders, including Kevin Palau, CEO of City Serve Portland.

According to TBC’s website, over half of the almost 8 million people in the 11 counties and 256 cities and towns in the Bay Area do not affiliate themselves with any church or religion. Since 2013, Transforming the Bay with Christ has sought to counteract this tendency by bringing strategic leaders together to “dream about how people of faith could work together to make life better for every person in the Bay Area—physically, educationally, relationally and spiritually.”<sup>18</sup>

## South Florida – Church United

Over fifty churches in Broward, Palm Beach, and Miami-Dade Counties in South Florida have partnered to form Church United, an initiative focused on addressing the needs of schoolchildren, the poor, and disadvantaged. Edwin Copeland is the director of

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<sup>18</sup> Pat Gelsinger, “From the Chairman of the Board,” Transforming the Bay, <https://www.tbc.city/about2/>, accessed January 14, 2019.



this coalition of churches dedicated to finding homes for foster children, improving poorly rated schools, raising money for victims of tragedy, and promoting the welfare of the community through the dissemination of holistic values. Church leaders pray and fast for the area once a month, and gather for strategy meetings once every quarter to equip their congregations to serve their cities. Church United South Florida is based in Fort Lauderdale.<sup>19</sup>

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The following section explains the procedures that were used in the data collection process. Two main phases of data collection were involved: (1) initial contact of research participants and preliminary organizational research, and (2) individual in-depth interviews (Appendix C). Table 4 provides an overview of these procedures.

#### **Phase One: Initial Contact and Preliminary Research**

The executive leaders of each GCM were identified and contacted according to the following procedures. First, background organizational research was conducted on each GCM. This preliminary research helped to confirm who the executive leaders were from each GCM. After the executive leaders were confirmed for each respective GCM, the second procedural step was to send out an initial Letter of Invitation to Research to each executive leader (Appendix A). Third, each executive leader responded voluntarily

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<sup>19</sup> Church United, “Uniting the Church for Mission,” <https://www.churchunited.city/>, accessed January 14, 2019.

Table 4. Data Collection Procedures

<b>Phase 1: Initial Contact of Research Participants and Preliminary Research</b>
Appendix A: Letter of Invitation to Research
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form
<p>The executive leaders of each GCM were identified through secondary organizational research.</p> <p>A Letter of Invitation to Research (Appendix A) and an Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) were sent to each GCM executive leader.</p> <p>The participants voluntarily responded to the invitations to research and returned the Informed Consent Forms via email attachment.</p> <p>The research team coordinated with respective administrative assistants to arrange for individual in-depth interviews.</p>
<b>Phase 2: Individual In-Depth Interviews (Appendix C)</b>
Appendix C: Interview Question Protocol
<p>An interview script and protocol was used in conducting the interviews.</p> <p>All interviews were conducted by a team of three researchers; one primary researcher who managed the interview process and two secondary researchers who captured the interview content.</p> <p>A web conferencing platform (Zoom) was used as the medium for each individual interview. Interviews were visually and audio recorded.</p> <p>Each interview lasted about 90 minutes.</p>

with interest in participating and contributing to the study. Fourth, when the research team received affirmation concerning participation, an email was sent for scheduling a Zoom call letting the executive leaders know that any of their staff were free to also participate upon their request. Fifth, the research team coordinated with the respective administrative assistants for each GCM to secure a date and time for the individual in-

depth interviews. Sixth, background research on the organization was conducted through their website, articles, and youtube videos. Seventh, the research team did some customization of the interview instrument based on the secondary background information gathered, for flow of conversation and to save time during the interview (filling in some information ahead of time and confirming during the interview time). Finally, prior to the interview an Informed Consent Form was sent for review and signature to each executive leader who participated in the research project (Appendix B).

### **Phase Two: Individual In-Depth Interviews**

Individual in-depth interviews were conducted via “Zoom,” a web conferencing platform that allows for secure, digitally visual and audio meetings. Each interview included a team of three researchers. The primary researcher strategically led the process of the interview itself, using probes and follow up questions to mine out relevant information with respect to the research focus. The secondary researchers managed the content of the interview, recording key themes, overall impressions, and arranging responses into initial categories of thought and expression. Prior to arriving at the arranged interviews, the research team reviewed the preliminary organizational research report, refreshed themselves in the interview question protocol, and checked the mechanics and recording quality of the Zoom web conferencing platform. Upon meeting the individual participant, the research team initiated a brief introductory greeting, warmly thanked them for their time, and provided a short rehearsal of the research study’s aims and the interviewing process. The primary researcher then inquired of the participants if there were any questions, qualifications, or objections regarding the

interview process. The primary researcher also asked if it was okay to record the interview. After receiving permission and responding to any potential questions or comments, the individual in-depth interview was commenced.

The individual interviews were conducted on-line, and lasted about 90 minutes each. After each interview was finished, the participant was thanked for their participation. The secondary researcher used a research journal to reflect on the process and content of each interview. All data files were placed in a safe private storage that is password protected and only accessible to the research team. Appropriate pseudonyms safeguarding confidentiality were assigned to each interview, and a separate table of pseudonym codes was generated. Each individual interview was transcribed word-for-word in order for the most accurate possible data analysis to ensue. The transcriptions of each individual interview were then transferred into the qualitative research analysis software, QSR NVivo 10, for data analysis.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The following section describes the procedural tasks and hermeneutical guidelines that were used to organize, analyze, and interpret the interview data in this study. Table 5 provides a summary overview of the data analysis procedures, while Table 6 specifies a corresponding outline of the hermeneutical principles that were used in the data analysis. The hermeneutical principles listed in Table 7 were also used as a reference tool in the data analysis process.

The research procedure used in this study followed Creswell's iterative model of data analysis, while also incorporating King and Horrocks' three-phase system of

thematic analysis.<sup>20</sup> Creswell articulates the spiraling dynamic of qualitative data analysis, which proceeds in a fluid and oscillating progression rather than a rigid and concrete ordering.<sup>21</sup> However, this spiraling dynamic of data analysis proceeded along the development of three successive stages outlined by King and Horrocks: descriptive coding, interpretive coding, and defining overarching themes.<sup>22</sup> This basic plan of data analysis also incorporated other pertinent insights and strategies for performing qualitative data analysis.<sup>23</sup> Two basic parts were involved in these procedures: preliminary analysis and in-depth analysis.

### **Preliminary Data Analysis**

For preliminary data analysis, the digitally recorded interviews were transcribed by a professional transcribing service. Pseudonyms were ascribed to each participant and person mentioned in the interviews. A research team member reviewed the recorded interviews and written transcriptions to become immersed in the data and to thoroughly comprehend each interview. These preliminary analyses helped to detect initial critical comments and responses from the participants related to the research question.

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<sup>20</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 183-196; Nigel King and Christine Horrocks, *Interviews in Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2010), 142-174.

<sup>21</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 183-196.

<sup>22</sup> King and Horrocks, *Interviews in Qualitative Research*, 142-174.

<sup>23</sup> Miles and Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis*; Carl F. Auerbach and Louise B. Silverstein, *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

Table 5. Data Analysis Procedures

I.	<p>Data analysis for this research project followed Creswell's spiral process and King and Horrocks' three-phase arrangement of analysis.<sup>24</sup></p> <p>A. The analysis process fluctuated between the tasks of reading transcriptions, reflecting, describing, classifying, and interpreting the data.</p> <p>B. This iterative process advanced through three phases: descriptive coding, interpretive coding, and defining overarching themes.</p> <p>C. Data analysis included preliminary analysis and in-depth analysis.</p>
II.	<p>Preliminary data analysis enabled the research team to detect initial relevant comments from the participants that relate to the research question.</p>
III.	<p>In-depth data analysis included: data reduction and data display.</p> <p>A. Data reduction incorporated open, axial, and selective coding.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Open coding involved highlighting, extracting, and clustering the essential units of thought pertaining to the interview questions.</li> <li>2. Axial coding involved identifying themes from the data. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The intent was to refine, differentiate, and organize the concepts resulting from open coding into conceptually larger themes.</li> <li>b. QSR NVivo 10 software was used to enhance and confirm the identification and organization of concepts and themes.</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Selective coding involved inductively discerning conceptual themes and hypotheses resulting from the themes of axial coding. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The procedure for selective coding had the same logical form as axial coding, but involved a higher level of abstraction.</li> <li>b. The researcher fluctuated between the stages of analyses to review and confirm the components of coding and resultant overarching themes.</li> <li>c. Data reduction continued until all of the interviews were analyzed.</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. NVivo 10 was used to perform microanalysis (analysis of individual words, phrases, and sentences in the data) as a confirmatory measure to ensure that all potentially relevant texts with respect to each theme were identified.</li> </ol> <p>B. Data display includes a textual description and discussion of the emergent themes in light of the research question.</p>

<sup>24</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*; King and Horrocks, *Interviews in Qualitative Research*.

Table 6. Hermeneutical Principles for Data Analysis

Hermeneutical principles were applied in the data analysis procedures:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Data reduction was conducted inductively. The research team did not address the transcription data with an external theory with which to artificially manipulate the data. Instead, the research team sought to bring out what emerged as important from the interview texts themselves.<sup>25</sup></li> <li>2. In open coding, the following criteria were used for data reduction: “Does it relate to your research concern?” “Does it help you understand your participants better?” “Does it clarify your thinking?”<sup>26</sup></li> <li>3. Concepts that repeatedly emerged in the data were identified and classified.</li> <li>4. Axial coding analysis included attending to metaphors and analogies used by the participants.</li> <li>5. Transitions in content were identified as potential markers of concepts and themes.</li> <li>6. Noting the similarities and differences among the highlighted concepts was another criterion used to identify themes.</li> <li>7. Linguistic connectors refer to words and phrases that indicate attributes and various kinds of causal or conditional relations. Linguistic connectors were another criterion used to determine concepts and themes.</li> <li>8. Each theme relied on a simple majority of greater than 50% response rate from of the participants as a criterion for verification.</li> </ol>

### **In-Depth Data Analysis**

For in-depth data analysis, two major procedures were followed: data reduction and data display. Data reduction refers to the “process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or

<sup>25</sup> Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, 117.

<sup>26</sup> Auerbach and Silverstein, *Qualitative Data*, 48.

transcriptions.”<sup>27</sup> This analytic process aims at sorting, focusing, and organizing data in such a way that theoretical propositions can be drawn and verified. Data display refers to “an organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action.”<sup>28</sup>

The process of data reduction began by transferring the interview transcription files into the QSR NVivo 10 program. Through coding, segments of data were assigned to one or more categories, and other similar pieces of data were subsequently allocated to these categories. Through the process of coding, the researcher retrieved, reduced, and organized the data into the most meaningful units of thought in relationship to the research question. Identification of key themes and patterns were thus organized from the transcribed interview texts.<sup>29</sup> There were three stages of inductive analysis involved in the coding process: open, axial, and selective coding.

### *Open Coding*

Open coding refers to the process of highlighting, segmenting, extracting, and clustering together the essential elements of thought from the interview questions. Each participant’s responses to the interview questions could thus be reduced to units of comment which were then grouped and compared with other participant’s responses to the interview questions. The intent was to capture the essential and most salient comments. This process involved bypassing tangential and unclear remarks, and

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<sup>27</sup> Miles and Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Miles and Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, 11.

<sup>29</sup> Amanda Coffey and Paul Atkinson, *Making Sense of Qualitative Data: Complementary Research Strategies* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), 26.



selecting comments directly relevant to the research question. A unit or comment refers to some manageable and meaningful thought, which may include a word, a phrase, or a complete sentence or number of sentences. When texts were found to meet these criteria, those texts were highlighted in the open coding stage. The QSR NVivo 10 program allowed the researcher to highlight and reduce the text into distinct units of meaning or concepts that emerged from the data. The generated concepts are referred to as *free nodes* in the NVivo 10 program. The briefest possible excerpts representing distinguishable ideas were used for analysis. Once each of the individual interview texts were analyzed in open coding, all of the emergent concepts were then further analyzed using axial coding to determine existing relationships among the concepts.

### *Axial Coding*

Axial coding is the process whereby the researcher identifies open coding concepts and classifies them with conceptually relating concepts from the data.<sup>30</sup> Axial coding refines, differentiates, and organizes the concepts resulting from open coding into conceptually larger units that were designated as themes.<sup>31</sup> The intent was to capture the recurrent trends of meaning from the participant's responses. The emergent themes that resulted in axial coding should not be considered as hard and fast, however the majority of comments within a theme demonstrated a strong conceptual relationship. The creation

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<sup>30</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 189-194.

<sup>31</sup> Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 310.

of themes facilitated the process of organizing and discovering the trends of meaning within the data.

#### *Use of QSR NVivo 10 Software to Enhance Open and Axial Coding*

The NVivo 10 program enhanced the tasks involved in the data analysis procedures. The primary benefit that NVivo served throughout the data analysis was to assist the research analysis process in cutting, sorting, organizing, and grouping selected texts into different folders with designated labels. As a software program, NVivo provided logistical tools that helped manage the data. There were two distinct modes of analysis in which the research team utilized NVivo. First, NVivo was used in the interpretive mode to facilitate the processes entailed in open and axial coding. In open coding, NVivo was used to highlight relevant data and formulate concepts, designated as *free nodes*. In axial coding, free nodes were clustered into larger conceptual themes, which are designated as *tree nodes*. Second, NVivo was used in a confirmatory mode to perform microanalysis on the data, to ensure that all potentially relevant texts and comments embedded in the interview transcriptions were properly identified for analysis. For microanalysis, the research team used NVivo's querying function that allows researchers to perform a "Text Search." After the emergent themes were created in axial coding, the research team utilized this querying operation to ensure that all of the relevant texts and comments embedded in the seven interview transcriptions that were associated with each theme were identified for analysis. This confirmatory process was followed for each of the themes that emerged in the data analysis, in order to ensure that all pertinent

interview remarks were thoroughly reviewed and analyzed in relationship to each emergent theme.

### *Selective Coding*

Selective coding involves analyzing the interrelationship between themes and inductively discerning the emergence of central themes to explain the data. This final coding stage extends the process of axial coding at a higher level of abstraction.<sup>32</sup> In selective coding, the researcher generated hypotheses from the themes that emerged in axial coding.<sup>33</sup> The procedure for inducing categories from themes followed the same logical process as the procedure used in axial coding for creating themes from concepts. Selective coding aimed at generating categories and hypotheses pertinent to the research question that explain the whole terrain of discovered themes and concepts. These categories involve “networks of themes or concepts and the relations between them.”<sup>34</sup> Throughout the three stages of in-depth data analysis, the analysis researcher fluctuated back and forth between stages in order to review and confirm the components of interpretive coding and the defining of overarching themes.

After the process of selective coding was completed, and sufficient overarching themes emerged, these central themes were displayed through a textual description and discussion of the emergent themes in light of the research question.

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<sup>32</sup> Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 312.

<sup>33</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 64-65.

<sup>34</sup> Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 297.

## Summary of Research Project Design and Procedures

The purpose of this chapter was to explain the rational principles, logistical methods, and procedural steps that were employed in this research project. The aim of this research study was to investigate the common identity and unique expressions of current largescale GCMs in the U.S., and to explore the perceived applicability and usefulness of the CI model to current largescale U.S. GCMs. This study was exploratory in nature, and utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to capture the emic perspectives of GCM executive leaders' experiences, thoughts, and beliefs with respect to the research focus. Given the aims of this particular research study, a phenomenological approach was considered to be an appropriate methodology because phenomenology is concerned with studying cases intensively in natural settings and by subjecting the resulting data to analytic induction.<sup>35</sup> Major data verification procedures that were utilized throughout the data collection and analysis process in this research study included: rich, thick description by using verbatim transcriptions, and clarification of researcher bias, specifically through deployment of a research team with differentiated and specified roles.

Two primary sources of data were utilized in this research study. First, background organizational research of each GCM provided a preliminary orientation of each GCMs history, leadership, unique expression, and strategic mission. Second, individual in-depth interviews were the main source of data for this study (Appendix C).

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<sup>35</sup> Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 13.

A purposeful sample selection procedure was described in detail, which utilized specified criteria to identify seven major GCMs in the U.S. that were selected for this study. Data collection procedures (Table 4) included two phases which were also clearly delineated: (1) initial contact of research participants and preliminary organizational research, and (2) individual in-depth interviews. The procedural steps (Table 5) and interpretive principles (Table 6) that were used for the data analysis procedures are also clearly explained. In the following Chapter Five, the research outcomes and conclusions of this study are presented.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSION**

#### **Introduction**

As the data collection and analysis process for this project unfolded, it became evident that each particular GCM in this study has a unique thumbprint that expresses a distinct story about its original genesis and early growth stages. The individuality of GCMs was an orienting feature of their composition, which was commonly acknowledged and celebrated by the participants in this study. As one GCM leader stated, “Every city has a different organizing principle of how they got started” (GCM-7).

One GCM had the underpinnings of “a two decade history of pastors praying together and meeting together and trying to get on the same page to work together and love this city.” The GCM in this city “grew out of an evangelistic festival vision and developed organically, not out of any traditional kind of starting... we didn’t intend to start a city movement... it began with wanting to see our city impacted.” The spark that catalyzed this GCM actually came from the mayor of the city, “who stood on the stage of the festival, and suggested, ‘Why wouldn’t you just keep serving, let’s just making this serving of the city an ongoing effort.’” From that point, the number of participating churches “went from less than 50, to 100, to 200, to 300” (GCM-1).

Another GCM leader recounted a different story about how the GCM was started in his city:

I was a missions pastor at a church; I was in pastoral ministry for 13 years. And we saw the division and the redundancy happening in our city, people stepping on each other's toes, not talking to each other... And so I had a real heart for city ministry, and had a decent network. And so they gave me half my time to start building this network that was in process at the time (GCM-5).

After about 5 years, this GCM leader was able to dedicate himself to full-time GCM leadership, and began adding other staff to help lead the movement.

The GCMs included in this study reflected diverse contextually-laden characteristics that shaped the impulse and contours of each movement. As one participant identified: "The church's work is usually characteristic of the people within that church, and within that region" (GCM-2). Another participant also counseled that it could "actually be unhealthy to try to imitate or mimic specific characteristics of individual movements" (GCM-7). The context, the given history, the way in which God sovereignly chose to move in the city, and the personality of major leader(s) were all factors that played out in the distinct formation of each GCM.

Appreciating the uniqueness of each of the GCMs explored in this study, there were nevertheless commonly shared features of core identity that were resonant and interwoven throughout them. These shared features of common identity are discussed as major themes in the following distilled summary of the research findings.

### **Reporting of the Research Findings**

With respect to the major research question of this study, in-depth analysis revealed five primary themes that repeatedly emerged as central to the major research

question, and which speak to the common identity and shared features of current largescale GCMs in the U.S. (see Table 7). Each theme relied on a majority response rate from the participants as a verification criterion. These five themes delineated in this section, build upon and extend the previous insights from the literature review considered in Chapter Three and a theological vision of the city that was articulated in Chapter Two.

Table 7. The Common Identity and Shared Features of GCMs

I. GCMs practice local orientation within particular city contexts.
II. GCMs share purposeful unity for city transformation. A. GCMs share a unity that is anchored by core gospel values. B. GCMs help collaborate together for missional impact. C. GCMs cultivate relational trust among leaders.
III. GCMs engage their cities with a holistic gospel. A. GCMs understand and express the gospel in both word and deed. B. GCMs work with civic leaders to serve the city in practical ways. C. GCMs endeavor to maintain the evangelistic edge of the gospel.
IV. GCMs incorporate the laity as integral to the movement.
V. GCMs express central operating characteristics. A. GCMs add value and mobilize local churches and nonprofits in the city. B. GCMs acknowledge the necessity of a GCM champion. C. GCMs embrace a convening role to connect, collaborate, and celebrate ministry. D. GCMs engage in continuous rhythms of purposeful communication.

### **GCMs Practice Local Orientation Within Particular City Contexts**

Participants in this study described how GCMs practice local orientation within particular city contexts. GCMs sought to understand and engage their cities within their unique socio-contextual milieus, in attempt to most effectively serve their cities with the gospel. This basic posture and approach of GCMs was clearly expressed by the leaders



who were interviewed in this project. For example, one GCM leader pointed out that “our thing has always been to make it about local mission. When you come together, make it about building relationships with local people who God has put in authority in your city, and you’re going to serve your city together” (GCM-2). Another GCM leader also elaborated:

The work will always be characteristic of the people in the church. So if they are tech. people, they are probably going to build some kind of tech. solution for kids that lack literacy. If they are a farm working society, it may look like aquaponics and hydroponics. And so it’s using the industry of people in that region to create the summary of what it is we’re going to be doing. I think if we were in the Bible Belt, I think it would be a much different strategy. So I think every region dictates a strategy. ...What works in one place, doesn’t work in another place. There are all of these microclimates, micro-demographics, and cultures (GCM-3).

The thrust of this theme was therefore not on the particular expressions or methods of how GCMs engaged and served their cities with the good news and practical service of the gospel. Rather, the point was that these GCMs shared an underlying common approach and process which sought to appropriately engage the unique context of their city with the gospel. This fundamental process was intentionally leveraged in order to discern identifiable strategies within particular city contexts. One participant explained this approach simply as “studying their city and executing on a vision that is unique to their community” (GCM-2). Another participant further elaborated on how this approach was implemented in his city: “We challenge the leaders to ask three questions: (1) What is the lostness of the city? (Which relates to the spiritual component). What is the pain of the city? (Which relates to the social component). And what is the brokenness of the city? (Which relates to the cultural component)” (GCM-6). This GCM leader went on to describe how utilizing this common process can lead to contextual insights about what the locally felt needs of a city may be:

Maybe in Hollywood that looks like homelessness. Maybe in East Fort Lauderdale that looks like a lot of foster care people, a lot of foster kids being removed out of their homes. Maybe in some of the other regions it looks like sex trafficking. The goal is to discern what people are saying is the number one kind of felt need (GCM-6).

This practice of local orientation within particular city contexts emerged as a significant shared feature of the GCMs that were included in this study, and is therefore considered as a core theme of their common identity.

### **GCMs Share Purposeful Unity for City Transformation**

The second major theme that emerged in this study was that GCMs share purposeful unity for city transformation. This theme was comprised of three subthemes: (1) GCMs share a unity that is anchored by core gospel values, (2) GCMs help local churches and nonprofits collaborate together for missional impact, and (3) GCMs cultivate relational trust among leaders.

#### *GCMs Share a Unity that is Anchored by Core Gospel Values*

This first subtheme was expressed by research participants in two discernable parts:

1. GCM leaders possess a theological conviction concerning church unity.
2. GCM leaders embody an attitude of humility and servanthood.

#### **GCM Leaders Possess a Theological Conviction Concerning Church Unity**

The GCM leaders in this study articulated a theological conviction concerning church unity and God's heart for the city, which fundamentally grounded their practice of

purposeful unity. One participant offered this simple but profound perspective concerning the theological basis of GCMs:

Every believer is simply part of the gospel movement that began on the day of Pentecost. And so, in once sense every city already has a city movement in a sense that it's made up of every single believer that's following Jesus and every church and every Christian non-profit, so it's a more of matter of recognizing, celebrating, and accelerating those pieces that are already there (GCM-1).

This perspective was repeatedly summarized by stressing that “we are together for the gospel” (GCM-1).

Another participant shared how “we boiled our vision down to six words: “The church united for the city.” This leader went on to explain, “There is just one church in our city, with 960 different expressions of that church. And so we want to see a deepening love, trust and unity, relational unity, grow within the church in our city that reflects the union that we already share” (GCM-5). This participant also emphasized the importance of aligning together around core gospel values rather than a traditional doctrinal statement:

We do not have a doctrinal statement for (our city), we have three values that are inherently doctrinal. These values can be expressed in the following three questions: (1) Do you love Jesus? Do you love (this city)? And do you believe Jesus can transform (this city) through the unity of his church? ...Those three questions perfectly align, or come out of our three values which are: Jesus and gospel centrality, church unity, and city transformation (GCM-5).

These core gospel values were also described as “center set not bounded set,” and “centering values” (GCM-5). Another GCM chose to use the Apostle’s Creed as its central doctrinal position: “We’ve chosen to come around the Apostle’s Creed, as a basic piece of doctrine... we find that to be the most generic and most agreeable” (GCM-2).

This shared theological belief concerning church unity was expressed as a deep conviction that drove the ethos and praxis of GCMs: “I think you have to be convinced

that it's what God wants. Because ultimately, if you care about God and the gospel, you're going to care about what He wants. If you're convinced unity in the body is really important, even though it's hard, you're going to keep doing it" (GCM-1).

Based on this theological conviction concerning church unity, the arrangement of GCMs tended to be widely inclusive of varying church denominations:

The vision is not for just more churches or more leaders of one type or one denomination, but rather a vision for the whole city. We would argue that to reach a city is going to require a coalition of churches across multiple denominations and expressions. So we don't pretend to think that we could reach a city with one or two denominations; we think it's going to take a coalition of many. And if we come back to the big vision, which is that it's not about making your church or your denomination flourish. We want that, but the big vision is really to see the city flourish. And there's not enough of you in your tribe or denomination to do that, so let's influence other expressions of the body of Christ to be able to do that (GCM-7).

#### GCM Leaders Embody an Attitude of Humility and Servanthood

In addition to a deep theological conviction about church unity, GCM leaders also characteristically conveyed a strong sense of humility and servanthood. This important concept was expressed on multiple operating levels of GCMs, including the levels of vision, organizational structure, interpersonal relationship, and practical example.

From a visionary perspective, the importance of humility and servanthood was succinctly expressed by one GCM leader who put it this way: "We need kingdom churches, not church kingdoms ... It's a church with a mindset to say, 'We care about the kingdom of God coming here, not just building our church kingdom'" (GCM-4).

Speaking from an organizational perspective, another participant expressed the importance of embodying a servant-oriented approach in how the GCM leadership in his city position themselves to empower and release authority to other churches and

ministries in the city: “I think a key thing is giving away power, giving away control and not being about your church but ‘The Church’ and how can we as an office drip feed into that” (GCM-6). This GCM leader also spoke to the priority of humility and servanthood on the relational level: “The ego factor, is very important; we cannot allow overriding ego in this dialogue. So, the humility of leaders is extremely important and so we challenge them to move from an ego-system to an ecosystem” (GCM-6).

There were also practical examples voiced about how churches have generously networked and shared resources with other churches in the city:

We have churches right now in the eastside that are actually, from the pulpit saying, “Hey, there’s a new church starting over here. If you’re in that zip code, you should go over there and help.” Another church I know said, “We’re going to send six or seven couples for a year to run your children’s ministries until your guys can get up and running.” It’s just amazing. It’s funny what you can get done when nobody cares who gets credit for it (GCM-2).

Embracing an attitude of humility and servanthood also translates practically into how larger group meetings are conducted, such as being careful to not have too many “asks” or commercials from other ministries. As another participant explained:

In terms of our agenda we’ve been very careful. We’ve had our ups and downs with this, our wins and our losses, but we don’t promote single ministries, we don’t become a platform for all the non-profits of the region... We have been able to steward that well so it doesn’t become a place of commercials. So, the guys never feel like we’re selling them anything (GCM-1).

### *GCMs Help Collaborate Together for Missional Impact*

The deep sense of shared unity expressed by GCM leaders in this study, was seen as then naturally leading into collaborative work together for city transformation. One participant brought these two ideas together this way: “We believe that when we can create a platform that drives people toward deepening relational unity and trust, that the

fruit of that will be transformation in our city... As pastors and church leaders come together to pray, build relationship and trust; over time, they will mobilize themselves to collaborate” (GCM-5). Another participant also confirmed this perspective by noting that “as pastors and church leaders come together to pray, build relationship and trust, over time, they will mobilize themselves to collaborate” (GCM-7). Another participant also tied these trajectories of unity and collaboration together as the kind of basic essence of the GCM in his city: “We’re just trying to build a network of friends who are committed to each other and committed to the city. And so the model is, always for us we gather faith leaders and help them become friends together, and we help them start to think about local mission together” (GCM-2).

Church unity was seen therefore, not as an end unto itself, but rather as something that is both galvanized by and purposed for – missional impact. Listen to how this was explained:

Faith communities will come together around mission. They won’t come together as just unity for the sake of unity, it isn’t sustainable. But unity around purpose works. And so you have to have that bullseye, like, “We’re going to start a church-school partnership movement all across our city.” That is what made that work. You gave everybody a common bullseye to go after (GCM-2).

Another GCM leader further concurred this perspective by noting how, “we recognized that we wanted to unify the church for a missional engagement that would bring faith, hope, and love to (our city) (GCM-6). Participants also explained how church unity is strengthened and sustained by missional focus: “It is the issue that people coalesce around, and that’s how you get that distilled cohort that stays” (GCM-2). These participants thus made it clear that unity must be for the purpose of collaborative mission, and that missional focus in turn also helps to mutually reinforce and maintain unity.

An additional benefit of missional collaboration is that smaller churches are enabled to partake in contributing to larger missional outcomes. This sense of participation in the larger gospel narrative of the city can consequently encourage and fuel smaller churches in their kingdom work and connection with the larger Church movement. Listen to how one GCM leader articulated this benefit:

One of the beautiful outcomes of collaborative engagement is where the smaller role player can feel that they are part of a much bigger impact. For instance, what happened in (our city) is that they went to the churches and said, “Can we clean up the way you’re caring for the orphans or the foster care process and challenge all the churches?” Some of the big churches took the big chunk but some of the other churches responded by submitting one or two or three people that could be part of that process and they could go back and say, “Guess what, we changed this part of the landscape because we were part of this program.” Even though their contribution was very small in relation to the problem, but that’s the neat thing about collaborative engagement or the unity process. ... You can go back to your constituency and say, we were part of this, and this is what we did. And so, it gives the smaller church specifically that kind of leveraging capacity to feel that they are part of the bigger narrative. (GCM-6)

A further expressed benefit of missional collaboration is that when churches work together towards a common goal it helps to change the perception of the Church in the city. Participants shared this perspective by reflecting that, “now whatever a non-believer thinks about the church starts to get challenged because they see all these believers going and serving the city together. That, I think, is really important” (GCM-2). Missional collaboration was thus seen as strengthening the perceived credibility of the gospel in the city: “You know having a relationship with the mayor, being in relationship with other churches, feeling like we’re together for the gospel ... seeing the fact that the way we live and love each other within the body and love our community – that gives a credibility to our gospel message” (GCM-1).

### *GCMs Cultivate Relational Trust among Leaders*

Participants in this study constantly affirmed the crucial role that relational trust plays within the living fabric of GCMs. There were two delineable aspects to this subtheme:

1. Inner relational trust.
2. Outer relational trust.

#### **Inner Relational Trust**

The idea of inner relational trust has everything to do with establishing and nurturing trusted relationships between Christian leaders. The whole enterprise of GCMs is “a highly relational endeavor” (GCM-3). Relationship is at the center of GCMs. As one participant championed, “the one word that defines us is ‘relationship’” (GCM-4).

It takes time to develop internal relationships of trust. As one participant put it, “the longer we journey together, the more the trust grows, the more that our relationships grow...” (GCM-6). Another participant also agreed that “the years of praying and building relationships of trust and getting to know their city and love their city are absolutely critical” (GCM-1). Building inner relational trust is thus a process that needs to be nurtured. This process was described by another GCM leader who shared that, “it usually begins with serving them first... Figure out what their needs are and develop a good relationship with that leader, and so it is leader to leader. And then once they are knitted together, then they can slowly be more broadly integrated in” (GCM-7).

This kind of inner relational trust not only takes time to develop, but also takes work to maintain. As another GCM leader reflected:



We've been able to maintain, to a remarkable degree, the trust of the spiritual leaders of (our city), from the Christian side; not talking about others, non-Christian leaders... We've been able to maintain the trust, and it's a lot of work. But when you've got it and you can keep it, there is almost no end to what you can do. It's not so much worrying about who's going to come and go; you just keep the relationships strong and the trust high with these leaders. Because then you can convene around issues and you can make decisions and move things. If you lose that, then it's very hard to recover it (GCM-1).

## Outer Relational Trust

GCM leaders also articulated the important idea of outer relational trust, which is concerned about the relational trust between Christian leaders in the movement, and community and civic leaders in the city. One participant reflected on the purposeful posture that he tried to convey when meeting with government leaders in his city:

I want to be able to meet with a government leader and have them not think that I'm trying to have an agenda. I want to be the one person they meet with that month, that they actually leave the meeting and go, "That guy didn't have an agenda, he wasn't trying to get anything from me. He wasn't trying to get famous by being around me." So that has been an important part of the posture for me (GCM-2).

GCM leaders also explained how cultivating this sense of outer relational trust requires embodying an attitude of humility and service for the city, with an eye towards building long-term relationships with other city leaders. As one participant described: "Going to the people that are the experts, whether they are faith based or not; so going to the mayor. Eventually it meant going to the school principals, school superintendents, Department of Human Services, and always having the same kind of posture of humility and wanting to have a long-term relationship" (GCM-1). Another GCM leader also corroborated how cultivating a service-oriented posture can build credibility and long-term relationships between the Church and the city:

We often tell faith leaders to not assert their opinions or what they think is best for the city. But simply ask the city, “How can we serve you?” And not come in with a vision or a dream, but how do we serve? And oftentimes, they’ll be given fairly low, trivial work to do. But after they earn trust and longevity with the city, they will be trusted with more opportunities and larger jobs (GCM-3).

Finally, when outer relational trust between the Church and the city is cultivated over time, a level of rapport can grow beyond individual relationships to take on a broader connection that could be called institutional relational trust. So that other civic leaders come to see that, “wow, this isn’t just an independent guy that is relating, or gal that is relating to other people. They have constituencies with them.” (GCM-4). Another participant also expressed this idea by reflecting that, “we had the credibility in the city because we had done these festivals before that had drawn tens of thousands of people.” Thus, outer relational trust between the Church and the city is something that can grow into a long term sense of credibility, even at an institutional level.

### **GCMs Engage Their Cities with a Holistic Gospel**

The third major theme that emerged in this study was that GCMs seek to engage their cities with a holistic understanding and expression of the gospel. This theme involved three discernable subthemes: (1) GCMs understand and express the gospel in both word and deed, (2) GCMs work with civic leaders in order to serve the city in practical ways, and (3) GCMs endeavor to maintain the evangelistic edge of the gospel.

#### *GCMs Understand and Express the Gospel in both Word and Deed*

The participants in this study repeatedly emphasized the twin aspects of the gospel as including both word (i.e., evangelism) and deed (i.e., service). GCM leaders

thus consistently conveyed the need to understand and faithfully express the gospel holistically. As one GCM leader championed, “I think the church is at its best when it’s both demonstrating and proclaiming the gospel. When those two are happening at the same time, it’s lights out. And that is when the church is at its healthiest; it’s when the gospel is at its healthiest” (GCM-2). Another participant also concurred by explaining how these twin aspects of the gospel are at the center of the GCM in their city: “We began with a truly holistic effort. We’re going to serve and then we’re going to share the good news and we’re going to intermingle those things” (GCM-1). This participant shared how these twin desires to both serve the city and share the good news of the gospel, were incipient in their city movement since the beginning of its formation: “When 2007 came around and there was a desire to do something big to impact the city, by that point there was the appetite in the churches for how we could serve the city as well as share the gospel” (GCM-1).

Understanding and expressing this holistic tenor of the gospel typified both the historical roots and the future vision of the GCMs that were considered in this study. One participant shared how the vision of church planting in his city intended to include churches that are “not just evangelistically effective churches, but ones that actually care for the city or the community that they are in” (GCM-7). Another GCM leader described the entire forward movement in his city as a “holistic gospel movement” (GCM-3).

The participants in this study also articulated a kind of operational sequence and synergy in how these twin aspects of the gospel are played out broadly in their cities. Namely, the general order followed, at least from an institutional perspective, was to first lead with acts of service and then to appropriately follow with various forms and

emerging opportunities for evangelism. This is how one GCM leader explained:

So I'm a raging evangelist, but I do think it's toxic for city movements to lead with evangelism. I think what happens is it means that we come with an agenda and it's, "We're going to do this so that people will do this." And non-believers just sniff that out, and it feels really fake. And it feels very artificial and weird to them (GCM-2).

Another participant also corroborated this basic sequential relationship between service and evangelism in the city, by sharing the mindset of GCM leaders in his city: "We'll be more effective in our evangelism and our unity if we can build it around serving the city" (GCM-1). Based on this rationale, the particular organizational contours of the GCM in this city has grown to include: "City Serve – under which anyone can serve the community, and then City Fest – which is more evangelistic. So, we created a place where the Christians could do both" (GCM-1). By building relationships through serving, personal bridges of reception can be constructed in hopes of the verbal message of the gospel being obtained. Therefore, as another participant explained:

Even if my neighbor never takes a step towards Jesus, Jesus' command to love my neighbor still stands. The irony is that people come to know Jesus all over the place. Because they go, "This person is trying to build a relationship, he's not trying to do something weird to me. He's not trying to debate me into heaven." Out of real relationship, we're able to share our hearts with people. And I think that is where the gospel thrives (GCM-2).

#### *GCMs Work with Civic Leaders to Serve the City in Practical ways*

For the GCMs in this study, expressing a holistic gospel for city transformation included partnering with civic leaders in order to better serve their cities in specific ways. Participants were reflective on the process of identifying what areas of service might be most beneficial for the church to join together in with the city. Overwhelmingly, GCM leaders were attuned to the importance of civic leaders themselves having a leading voice

in setting this agenda. As one GCM leader put it, “I think it’s better when it comes from their own local government leader” (GCM-2). Another participant also echoed that the Church’s role is to come in with “a posture of help us serve in effective ways” (GCM-1). Similarly, another GCM leader concurred that “when you go to city officials with your own agenda, that is not servant leadership. When you go to them and say, ‘Our starting point will be meeting your need,’ that opens doors eventually down the road for other things” (GCM-3).

To make way for civic leaders themselves to frame the agenda for city service, one GCM leader recounts how they “gathered all the pastors in the city together, reached out to the city manager and they sat down in a meeting. And they had the civic leaders share, ‘Would you show us the city through your eyes? Would you help us see the community through your eyes, and where do you feel stuck?’” (GCM-2). This focusing question then became “the catalyst for anything that happens in the city” (GCM-2). Thus, the process of forming city partnerships includes “going to the people that are the experts, the governmental or the non-profit experts that are on the ground doing the work, and finding the places you can actually serve and make a difference” (GCM-1). In one GCM, this process has developed into what they call the “Amplify” initiative. This GCM leader explains how this includes: “Working with government to create holistic systemic solutions around causes in a region. So if the city is struggling with an issue, we create a collaborative cohort that will have a government leader, if not multiple government leaders, a part of the solution that we are creating for a region” (GCM-3).

By cultivating a consistent posture of service and partnership for the good of the city, GCMs have been able to serve their cities in significant practical ways. In one city,

the mayor invited the churches of the city to serve in the areas of “homelessness, hunger, healthcare, and partnering with local public schools” (GCM-1). Since then, the churches in this city have become actively involved, and even leading in the areas of “school partnerships, foster care, and refugee care” (GCM-1). Another participant described how “over time, we started becoming a mobilizer of churches, specifically in our city, around foster and adoption issues with DSS, and then with our school system” (GCM-5). In another city, the GCM has participated in “job creation, short-term housing, long-term housing, a systemic change cohort for homeless veterans, socioeconomic bridge-gapping, and also spiritual community and community integration. Alongside that comes psychiatric, emotional, mental and spiritual care” (GCM-3). This GCM leader envisions the church as a “transformative force in our society.” He went on to ask, “Why can’t Christians be known for systemic change models that transform cities?” (GCM-3).

#### *GCMs Endeavor to Maintain the Evangelistic Edge of the Gospel*

Given the concern for GCMs to faithfully serve their cities in practical ways, in the name of the gospel, the participants in this study also emphasized the need to maintain an evangelistic edge in the movement. The GCM leaders in this study recognized the importance of maintaining and reinforcing the verbal content of the gospel. As one participant reasoned, “the challenge is to keep a tension, or balance, so that if we’re not careful ten years down the road it’s basically like the church exists only to serve the community and we’re not seeing people come to Christ and churches aren’t growing” (GCM-1). Acknowledging this tension recognizes the enduring verbal dimension of the gospel: “Biblically, you cannot understand the good news of Jesus and

how to have a relationship with God through Christ without a lot of verbal content” (GCM-1).

Another participant reflected on this need to maintain an evangelistic edge in the movement, by considering the organizational structures of GCMs. This participant expressed a concern that parachurch-centered GCMs can have a tendency to become overly involved in tertiary activities at the expense of diminishing the verbal expressions of the gospel. He explains:

I have seen a tendency of GCMs that become too involved in tertiary stuff and way too parachurch-centered. So if we’re not careful in these movements, what we’ve discovered, is that if the church leaders don’t rise up, then the parachurch leaders rise up too much and take control. And I think that is okay, but it’s not good long-term. So that is actually one of the things that does concern me (GCM-7).

Thus while the participants in this study stressed the importance of not only expressing the gospel in word, but also in deed; they also maintained the concern to not diminish the faithful verbal proclamation of sharing the good news.

### **GCMs Incorporate the Laity as Integral to the Movement**

The fourth major theme that emerged in this study was that GCMs incorporate the laity as integral to the movement. Participants in this study expressed the urgent need for including marketplace members and their work into a thicker and integral vision for embodying a faithful gospel witness in the city, for the common good of the city. This is how one GCM leader articulated the importance of integrating faith and work into the larger paradigm of what GCMs are all about:

The commerce side becomes the most important piece. Connecting Sunday faith to Monday work for people in the pews, if what we’re seeking to accomplish does not translate down to people who come to these churches on Sundays, if this is

just an endeavor to capture pastor's hearts, minds, and imaginations, then we're really wasting our time. The need is to help business and marketplace leaders see what they do as part of the kingdom, from a kingdom perspective. The challenge is for pastors to help their people to see themselves through the larger vision of what God is accomplishing in the city, so that they can then join in this process. So how do pastors connect with their people to disciple them in their vocations to the larger vision that we feel God is trusting us with and calling us to here in the city? (GCM-6).

Similarly, another participant reiterated that "I think that we underestimate the value of the business leader and the congregation, and how influential they can be..." (GCM-3).

Recognizing and incorporating marketplace members into the larger paradigm of GCMs involves: "Connecting key business leaders and kingdom capital to entrepreneurial common good solutions, to solve the city's problems. This starts with people in the pews connecting what they do with what we believe God is calling us, as the capital "C" Church to accomplish in their region" (GCM-6). Empowering and engaging believers in the marketplace sectors is beginning to revolutionize GCMs. Part of this transformation is being realized as lay believers are rediscovering themselves and their vocations as essential, rather than tangential, to what God is doing in their cities.

This is captured by the following GCM leader who explained:

I think, for many of them for the first time in their Christian life, they heard people talking about the Bible and theology in a way in which not only were they included, but they were essential. And I think, in the end, that was just a game-changer. For the first time they started going, "Wow, I'm being given a paradigm and a vision that is right from the Bible, that I'm an essential part of" (GCM-2).

Another participant also described how business leaders felt sidelined and were starting to come together through the convening efforts of the GCM in his city: "We saw that business leaders and other sector leaders outside the church were often marginalized in their involvement in the gospel. They wanted to see business leaders and church leaders come together and work together for a transformative movement" (GCM-3).



Seeing the impact that is taking place in and through business leaders, participants in this study described how they are beginning to focus more time investing in business leaders to help them utilize their platforms and leverage points for gospel impact in their cities. As one GCM leader explained:

What I'm evolving into now is I spend more and more time helping local business leaders realize that what they do at their work counts, that it's real ministry. And validating the fact that their best leverage point they're ever going to have in their life, for kingdom impact, is what they do every day for eight hours. "Have you ever thought that maybe your place of work is your best leverage point for kingdom impact? You have served on all these church boards, you have done all this. Think about what you're holding in your hand at work." And a lot of times they have just segmented their faith life and their work life. (GCM-2)

The purposeful incorporation and empowerment of lay business leaders has also begun to reciprocally transform GCMs themselves. For example, the world of business often moves at a faster pace than the world of church and government. This difference can thereby generate a creative tension for GCMs, which can lead to their own internal transformation from the inside-out. Here is how one participant described this:

Church and government move at the speed of church and government. It's not hard to get the business leaders in the room; it's hard to keep them in the room. They get really frustrated. Small, medium-sized business owners, they make decisions on a dime and they are off and running. And so the pace that churches and local governments work at is pretty tough for business leaders to stomach. But if you keep them in the room, they will accelerate the church and business stuff. They will accelerate the pace (GCM-2).

Another way that business leaders are shaping GCMs is by bringing a more pragmatic edge to their operations. As another participant explained, business leaders "are going to be more pragmatic in the way they approach city transformation. They want to move needles. They want to see measurable transformation. And I think they are good accountability for pastors." (GCM-5).

Participants also described ways in which companies can explicitly engage in serving their city. For example, one GCM worked with business leaders to create employee volunteer programs:

What an employee volunteer program does is it helps retention with their employees, it builds chemistry, and it creates ownership. The employees start to choose how they want to serve and make an impact, and it creates culture in their company. So a lot of times I'll just encourage them to start with an employee volunteer program. I help companies mobilize their employees out to serve in the community. So it's non-believers and believers serving together, and the employer is giving them three days off a year, paid days off, to do that (GCM-2).

Other participants also described how GCMs are helping companies engage in city service through job creation. As one participant explained, "we are raising the level of entrepreneurship. So there have been new versions of Christian Businessmen of America or different things like that, that are more related to where they are" (GCM-5). Another GCM leader explained how they have rallied around different business leaders to create jobs in the city:

So that is encouraging churches and business leaders within the churches to create innovative solutions like job creation. So one guy came to the cohort and he was an ex-NASA engineer, and he said, "I do a lot of work overseas but I don't do anything local that is really transformative." And we worked with him to create an LED solar factory. Well, it was his craft, it was his gifting, and he got all his NASA engineers out of bed and they built a pretty robust service that will employ 33 homeless this year. If we didn't find a NASA engineer, it would have been somebody else with a different job, a mechanic, and he would have built auto shops. So whatever that gifting is, we want to exploit that gifting and open that up to the community (GCM-3).

In summary, GCMs are championing the integral role that marketplace members and leaders have in the cause of the gospel for the city. This has led to business leaders being stimulated to "think about their faith, not just as a way to survive, but the way they can utilize their faith to create a more thriving city" (GCM-4).

### **GCMs Express Central Operating Characteristics**

The fifth major theme that emerged in this study was that GCMs express central operating characteristics. This theme was comprised of the following four subthemes: (1) GCMs add value and mobilize local churches and nonprofits in the city, (2) GCMs acknowledge the necessity of a GCM champion, (3) GCMs embrace a convening role to connect, collaborate, and celebrate ministry, and (4) GCMs engage in continuous rhythms of purposeful communication.

#### *GCMs add Value and Mobilize Local Churches and Nonprofits in the City*

This subtheme was voiced by participants in two distinct concepts:

1. GCMs add value to local churches and nonprofits in the city.
2. GCMs mobilize local churches and nonprofits to more effectively engage their cities with the gospel.

#### *GCMs add Value to Local Churches and Nonprofits in the City*

The GCMs in this study positioned themselves in a serving role toward the local churches and nonprofits in their cities. Fundamentally, they were concerned with the common question of how they might add value to the Church. The desire to serve and add value to the Church typified the underlying agenda and organizational posture of GCMs. Thus GCM leaders explained, “that is our agenda, we equip and resource the Church to accomplish a larger city vision” (GCM-6). Another participant also described how “we’ve discovered that you have to serve them first. Figure out what their needs are and develop a good relationship with that leader” (GCM-7). The defining question

around the relationship between the GCM and the local churches and nonprofits was:

“How can we help you?” (GCM-3). That is, “we look to add value. What is something that you need right now that we could help with?” (GCM-3). In this regard, GCM leaders also explained the importance of intentionally cultivating and grounding themselves in this organizational posture of servanthood:

I think when a city movement comes in and asserts themselves that, “Now that we are here, a city movement is going to happen.” I think it’s the biggest course correct to instead say, “The movement has already been happening. How do we catalyze that movement with servanthood? And how do we add value to that ‘already’ movement that God is doing?” (GCM-3)

By adding value to the local churches and nonprofits in the city, GCMs “help them do ministry more richly” and “amplify the work and serve the already-work that is being done” (GCM-3). What kinds of value adds are GCMs helping to provide to local churches and nonprofits in the city? Several GCM leaders elaborated:

(Our GCM) can add values, like adding professional competency, bringing in teaching and training on a professional level, adding relational connectedness, helping gather the key pastors in the region, and then adding soul care. So we often find that leaders don’t have leaders. And so we are able to give a small soul care moment to help minister to their souls also. So those are all value-adds that we offer... (GCM-3).

Another participant further expounded on the value add of providing soul care for Christian leaders in the city. He described that, “we got so much traction with soul care that we are in the process of finalizing what a continuum of care would look like for soul care in this region as part of this process. Starting with, catching guys on the front end, pre-burnout, doing soul care and check in and creating a safe third space” (GCM-6). This GCM leader envisioned growing the area of soul care into “a fully orbbed system as a way to care for pastors and leaders” (GCM-6). Listen to how the arena of soul care is developing as a value add for the Church in this city:

Our vision is to take that beyond just the key leader, and to have that life giving resource open to the church as a whole, to church staffs as a whole, whether you are an executive, an associate, a pastor's wife, or a family member. That we have a space where we say we need to care for our pastors and our leaders. And that becomes a huge value add for (the Church). ...We have even seen some pastors who we needed to send away for a weekend. We found them a sponsor, and paid for them to go to a hotel and enjoy the weekend. That kind of thing is all part of this bigger reference called soul care (GCM-6).

Due to the success that has been gained in the soul care arena, this GCM is starting to build out a spectrum of different kinds of care provided in the city, "a continuum of care, which would include the dimensions of spirit, soul, and body" (GCM-6). This includes components such as "financial training," and "a gathering for pastors to come every Friday morning to a bible study, which is just for leaders where they could actually be equipped by a professor" (GCM-6).

Another kind of value ad that GCMs are offering to local churches and nonprofits in the city is providing networking and connecting points for leaders around specific areas of ministry. For example, in the area of church planting:

We play a concierge role, where we really do come across a lot of church planting agencies and individual church planters who are new to the area. And one of our guys, in particular, will spend half a day with these guys, driving them around the area, looking at the geography, seeing what other churches already exist... Hooking them up with these pastors' networks that we've talked about, so once they get here, they are not alone but they are a part of that network (GCM-3).

### GCMs Mobilize Local Churches and Nonprofits in the City

Mobilization within the city is the second major influence that GCMs seek to provide to local churches and nonprofits. That is, GCMs see their role as convening organizations that can serve local churches and nonprofits by mobilizing them for more effective gospel ministry. Rather than seeking to do ministry directly, GCMs instead help to mobilize other churches and ministries in the city. As one GCM leader reflected,

“we were not starting a program of our own, we were trying to mobilize the sleeping giant, the not fully engaged resource – which is the body of Christ” (GCM-1). This perspective was reinforced by another participant who explained: “So over time, we started becoming a mobilizer of churches, specifically in our city, around foster and adoption issues with DSS, and then with our school system... And so I signed MOU’s with both of those groups, to where we help facilitate school-church partnerships” (GCM-5). Another GCM leader also described how, “we now have podded interested churches around specific issues that our city, we see as challenges in our city” (GCM-4).

The specific areas of urban ministry were variegated depending on the particular city context. One GCM was focused on “homeless vets, foster care, and education” (GCM-3). Another GCM developed a “huge neighboring initiative” (GCM-2). The common feature was thus that GCMs help to organize specific areas of ministry to which other local churches and nonprofits can be mobilized for greater ministry. What made this important theme common to all the GCMs in this study, was not the instantiated areas of ministry per se, but rather the repeated underlying principle of mobilization.

Several important components also emerged with respect to how GCMs navigate what it means to mobilize other churches and nonprofits toward more effective gospel engagement in the city. Part of this endeavor included raising awareness to other churches and groups, concerning who the other key players are in the city and what they are already doing. So that others become aware of “churches that are already in the game, making them aware of who the other players are so they are not unintentionally stepping on each other’s toes and nobody knows what’s going on” (GCM-1).

Connected to the element of awareness is the critical work of assessment. By assessing the current state and needs of the city, GCMs can begin to effectively mobilize constituent churches and nonprofits towards greater gospel ministry in the city. This involves GCMs “promising we will do the hard work of trying to assess the work that the churches are already doing and then work with churches to raise the vision and get a lot more engagement. So, churches that are on the sidelines, let’s get them into the game” (GCM-1). One example of assessment leading to mobilization was in the area of church-school partnerships: “With school partnerships we found a few churches that were serving public schools. There were a lot more that were interested but didn’t really know that you could do that, or didn’t think it was legal, or didn’t think that they would be received by a principal. So, we gave the churches permission” (GCM-1).

GCMs can also assist in mobilization by helping lift other leaders’ vision beyond the scope of their own local churches where they may otherwise feel stuck. As one GCM leader recounted:

When I sit down with a senior leader or a pastor, a guy that has been pastoring for 15-20 years and we are talking this way, casting these big broad visions and asking how you father your city, pastor your region. A lot of those meetings end in tears, of guys saying, “I haven’t talked this way since seminary,” or “I’ve been caught up in the business of church and payroll and managing a 15 million dollar budget, and you are helping me rediscover my calling, rediscover what it means to be the local church in the region” (GCM-6).

Another way that GCMs can contribute toward mobilization in the city by helping accelerate the scalability of ministry in the city. As one participant explained, “what we try to do then is have a template with a city, and say, ‘Okay, this is where you are on this continuum. What could we help you with over the next five years to go from this place to the next, by God’s grace?’” (GCM-3). Another example of accelerated

scalability was with a neighboring movement: “The One Congregation One Family scaled pretty well, but it required a lot. You had to have a couple organizations and it was our now governor saying, ‘We have a thousand churches in the metro area and we have a thousand homeless families. Wouldn’t it be great if every church mentored one homeless family?’” (GCM-2).

The GCMs explored in this study shared central operating characteristics along the lines of adding value and mobilizing local churches and nonprofits in the city. This is being accomplished by GCMs serving local churches and nonprofits and providing key resources such as soul care, equipping, and networking. Mobilization is pursued by GCMs through organizing areas of ministry, bringing awareness, assessing the city’s needs, elevating vision, and supporting accelerated scalability of ministry.

#### *GCMs Acknowledge the Necessity of a GCM Champion*

The participants in this study repeatedly stressed the essential need for a GCM champion who can gain and maintain momentum for a city movement to operate. This keystone leader was variously designated as a “custodian,” “convener,” “city connector,” and “catalyst.” A GCM champion is fundamentally needed to formulate and drive the process of establishing a GCM. As one participant made clear, “I think you need a custodian. However, that is defined. You need an agent that will drive this process as somebody that believes in it and gives their life to it and will be persistent. That is the first thing you fundamentally need” (GCM-6). Another participant also confirmed that “the person who calls the party is everything. It all rises and falls on that” (GCM-2). Furthermore, “It takes the right person to be able to convene” (GCM-3).



A GCM champion was described by the participants as possessing certain necessary attributes in order to effectively connect others together for the greater cause of the Church in the city. For example, participants frequently highlighted that an effective GCM champion must possess a high relational IQ and a large amount of relational equity in the city. As one participant described: “So that is the model for us: you find a city connector, the right person who has lots of relational equity. And then they gather pastors and leaders together, and build a bridge towards local government leaders...”

(GCM-2). Another leader also expressed the vital relational work of a GCM champion:

You need this convener, this person, a man of peace. You need some convening capacity, somebody that becomes that convening capaciator that is a non-threatening entity that can bring people around the table. If we did not have a boots-on-the-ground person that had the network of relationships, the heart and the acumen for this process, all of our dreaming and strategic processes would have amounted to nothing (GCM-6).

Along with having high relational equity and IQ, effective GCM champions were also described as being attuned to a larger kingdom perspective regarding the work of the Church in the city. Listen to how this perspective was described:

The “kingdom-minded” phrase is really important. It is a highly relational endeavor... It’s really important to identify the catalyst leader in the region. And so finding somebody that has that gravitas and that has that kingdom-minded perspective of the church in the (City). So they are not only focused on their particular church, we call that the “small c” church, and they are really encouraging of what God wants to do in the “big C” church (GCM-3).

Another participant described this larger kingdom perspective of GCM champions as being “apostolic” because of their larger vision and ability to do pioneer gospel work across networks of ministries. He explained, “I mean, they are apostolic. They are moving through these other regional networks of churches, both training and gathering information that helps foster the movement” (GCM-4).

Finally, GCM champions were described as possessing influential credibility that can be leveraged for convening other leaders toward shared ministry purposes. Namely, “that leader will always have a lot of gravitas, if you will, or the ability to convene people because of their reputation in the region” (GCM-3). In this sense, a GCM champion cannot just be “a pastor who couldn’t figure out how to make it work at a church... They are great people, they have a genuine heart for unity, but they just don’t have the authority to be able to call up the influential pastors in the city” (GCM-2). The attribute of credibility is also needed to work with different spheres of civic authority. As one participant shared, his organization had this credibility in their city with respect to being able to mobilize people, which led to the mayor of the city being open to partner with them. He explains: “That was what gave the Association this credibility and this big leg up with the mayor and the people, is that we had proven that we could mobilize people to do things” (GCM-1).

#### *GCMs Embrace a Convening Role to Connect, Collaborate, and Celebrate Ministry*

The GCM leaders who participated in this study were thoughtful about the nature of ministry collaboration between the broader GCM and its constituent parts, comprised of local churches and nonprofits. The overarching desire was to “create and see a city flourish and look at how we create a gospel ecosystem here in this region with all of its components” (GCM-6). To that end, GCM leaders carefully operate so as to connect, collaborate, and celebrate ministry; without trying to overtly direct or control ministry. The consensus of thought was that “the best initiatives are the ones that come up, they bubble up from the ground level” (GCM-2). GCM leaders were thus purposeful about

what kind of operating principles might foster authentic collaboration and buy-in from individuals toward a larger city movement. Therefore, “we said the way we will do that will be on three levels: we will connect, we will collaborate, and we will celebrate” (GCM-6). Another GCM leader likewise testified that “we are a neutral convener” (GCM-5). Participants thus emphasized that “movements have to be catalyzers, they cannot be controllers” (GCM-3). This was again echoed by another participant who noted that “one of our values is not controlling, but we are really big on influence. Reaching large cities is the need and task” (GCM-7).

To illustrate an exemplary expression of how this careful process can be charted, consider how one GCM followed this procedure in their city:

We worked at getting our key guys around the table, I think off the top of my head there is 17. And then we said, “What are you trusting God for? What do you guys want to see happen in the space of the spiritual, cultural, and social?” And then, based on all of their feedback from coffees and lunches, hearing their hearts, hearing where their church is at, we took all of that and collected into what we called Vision 2020. Moving the spiritual needle from 3 percent to 6 percent, engaging education through an education forum, mobilizing commerce through a commerce forum, looking at strategic evangelism and church planting and starting forums around those things. And then we had every church say, I want to opt into this, I want to opt into that, I want to be a part of that. So, it is not a directive thing, it is an opt-in process that we pitched.

In this example, the role of the GCM was “seen as a facilitation not as a controlling mechanism. So, the office itself must be a resource, it must be an empowering environment” (GCM-6). The GCM leaders here were careful to “give context, but not directive. They said, ‘This is how we’re going to create a framework,’ and they left it up to the key leaders around the table to say, ‘Now how do you see yourselves through this?’ The feedback and their own expression and voice in that process became paramount” (GCM-6).

By following this process of collaboration and coordination, smaller constituent churches and ministry groups can in turn mobilize individual people in their own particular contexts to engage in larger city ministry efforts. In this way, the role of the GCM is seen as operating in the wholesale space of collaborating and coordinating ministry needs broadly in the city; rather than functioning in the retail mode of engaging individuals toward specific areas of ministry. Therefore, “getting down to the people in the pews cannot be owned or facilitated by this office. It has to go from the senior leader to his executive, downline to his staff. No matter the size of the church, I think that is the process” (GCM-6). This perspective was also exhibited by another participant who expressed that “we don’t have a lot of volunteer opportunities for people that are engaged in churches. We are creating a platform for the church to mobilize itself. And so if any volunteer opportunity comes up, it is because one of the networks created an opportunity for that to happen, not because we did at an organizational level” (GCM-5). The intent of this process then, is for “vision to emerge out of the local senior leaders. If we start dictating the specifics of the vision, then we are going to be the ones having to make it happen” (GCM-3).

Participants also voiced how this kind of collaborative process is accelerated by intentionally recognizing and celebrating ministry efforts and successes. One GCM leader stated this succinctly by saying: “What we celebrate, we accelerate.” He went on to further explain how “movement leaders celebrate what is already working, and that can lead to people feeling like the wind of the Spirit is behind it, where there is progress. We choose to accelerate in areas where something is happening” (GCM-1). Another participant further nuanced how collaborative successes can be effectively celebrated:

Celebrate small wins, celebrate them early, celebrate them often. Even small expressions of “These two churches came together to do X,Y, or Z,” or “These three churches came together to do a love day or whatever.” Putting that out in front of people, and then looking at “We were able to distribute 53,000 pounds of food...” keeping those types of numbers, so it is not like, “We all got together and donated and a mom got a car or something.” But rather, “This was the number, this was how many people participated,” and you were able find yourself, be it a church of 30 to a church of 3,000, as a part of that story and collectively celebrate those wins (GCM-6).

After mutually agreed upon areas of ministry are identified, patterns of communication then follow between GCMs – senior leaders – and church or ministry members. Therefore, from the perspective of GCM leaders:

The majority of our communication is direct to the senior leader or in some cases the key number two guy. And then we leave it up to the church. We provide the messaging, we provide the video, we provide everything but they have to own it at the end of the day. This can’t be the (GCM leaders’) show that says this is what we want you to do. This is up to them, to opt-in. And the longer we journey together the more the trust grows, the more that our relationships grow, the easier and easier that becomes (GCM-6).

### *GCMs Engage in Continuous Rhythms of Purposeful Communication*

At least two basic leadership structures emerged as central organizational features for the GCMs that were explored in this study. First, at the core of the leadership is a smaller group of executive leaders, variously termed as “senior catalysts,” “steering team,” “executive leaders,” “cabinet,” “main governing board,” and “city fathers.” Second, on a broader level there is a larger associate group typically made up of senior pastors and influential leaders. The way in which communication happens within GCMs is best understood in light of these main leadership groups.

Different rhythms of connection and communication were expressed by GCMs along the lines of these two different leadership groups. One GCM leader explained how, “our main governing board meets four times a year” (GCM-3). Another participant

shared how the core leaders in his city participate in “every month meetings of our steering team and then big building block events for the year” (GCM-1). Another participant explained: “The city strategy team meeting: That is made up of the people that are the leaders of our networks. That meets every other month. And that is basically to do cross-network collaboration. It’s a shared learning time” (GCM-5). Another GCM leader shared how they moved away from monthly meetings and started doing an annual three-day retreat together as core leaders:

I’ll never go back to just trying to get pastors in the room once a month. We just get so much more out of the retreat. It’s only the core eight pastors in our city that go on this retreat. It’s the key eight people, who are at the center of everything. We always do something fun, we go ATVing, or zip line. We always do one thing that is outside, where we are all together, like white water rafting. We always do something very fun that they would normally never do on their own. And then we always have time together. We are saying, “What do you see? Let’s think about the last year? What were we able to get done together? What weren’t we able to get done together? What are the things that we said we were going to?” (GCM-2).

GCM leaders also explained the communication patterns for the larger advisory group of leaders. For example, one participant explained that, “we have an advisory board, which is 25 folks, that is a little bit less of a leadership commitment. The advisory board meets two times a year. But we also have ongoing meetings with them throughout the year. We want to best utilize their time and talents, more than building a board for a board’s sake” (GCM-3). Another participant described how the advisory group in his city is composed:

We have another group of about 25 that make up an advisory group. The advisory group is made up of key senior pastors, market place people that are helping provide some funding and thinking things through for the market place perspective, and then some of the key non-profit leaders that are leading the initiatives that have been birthed or that are collaborative in nature. (GCM-1).

A shared goal for this broader advisory group of leaders was to develop “robust pastors networks” (GCM-3).

To foster the relationships and communication among this bigger group of leaders, one GCM scheduled monthly lunch meetings. These meetings are intended to be anchor points that scaffold and lead to ongoing communication:

The lunch, these kind of scheduled events provide a definite touch point. But I would say they are a touch point for the relationships. So there’s lots of text messages, lots of phone calls, lots of email threads... But I would use the meeting times almost like they are anchors that tether the relationships. But the relationships are functioning all the time. And that lunches, for instance, would be the expression of relationships that we argue is probably the greatest binding agent in thickening them (GCM-4).

Another GCM is seeking to augment connectivity and relationship through monthly days of prayer. This GCM is still working out how continuous prayer might look in their city:

The first Wednesday of every month we are getting all the churches that are in the ecosystem to commit to a day of prayer and fasting as it fits their tradition. But they are doing this together collaboratively. But what we realize is, we still are grappling with crafting a sensible and kind of continuous prayer process within this environment (GCM-6).

Participants in this study recognized the importance of not trying to gather senior pastors together too often. As one GCM leader expressed:

We don’t try to gather monthly. There is no way a senior pastor of a large church is going to gather that often. So you have a steering team that is going to be meeting way more often, like monthly. And then this advisory group is going to meet a few times a year. So they are in because they believe in the vision of it. They are going to mobilize their people to the right things. But they also know that they are not being asked to come to a monthly meeting. They just won’t do that, not the guys in (my city) (GCM-1).

Another purposeful rhythm of communication that participants articulated was to leverage larger events that will lead to ongoing connectivity and shared ministry in the city. For example, one GCM leader shared how “the purpose of Movement Day is to

create connectivity for Christian leaders in a city to connect them to ongoing platforms for mission and ongoing conversations through the year, that are all part of the broader movement” (GCM-5). These larger gatherings make up a bigger communication flywheel that operates concurrently with the mid-size and smaller flywheels of communication. As another GCM leader explained, “we are looking this year to downsize to two events instead of three large events... It’s like we are pushing on the leverage points of the large gatherings, and big name speakers, as well as the smaller networks of people that are committed behind the radar and get things done” (GCM-3).

Continuous rhythms of purposeful communication is something that is maturing and growing in GCMs. As one participant stressed, “we are constantly adapting and trying to improve communication. We are kind of scratching our heads a bit on how to improve the communication” (GCM-4). This includes experimenting with media tools: “To the wider group, social media and email distribution, there are multiple channels. We utilize a Facebook page, Twitter, we put stuff out on Instagram” (GCM-4). There is also a need for dedicated administrative assistants who can help with communications. As another participant reflected: “I’m in the process of doing a new hire, and I don’t have the ability to hire a full-time communications director but it is going to be part of a role. It is so vital for a city movement to communicate well” (GCM-5).

### **Collective Impact and Gospel City Movements**

A secondary objective of this research study was to explore the perceived applicability and usefulness of the CI model to current largescale GCMs in the U.S. Based on this exploratory study, we can discern both differentiating and overlapping



features that are shared between CI and GCMs. That is, GCMs are not completely like CI initiatives in several respects. For example, the core leadership groups of GCMs are faith-based and do not include leaders from other social sectors. Rather, GCMs engage other sectors and partner with them on particular social issues. Thus, for GCMs, their shared unity and purpose presupposes any particular social issue. Additionally, CI initiatives tend to be organized around single yet complex social problems. For CI, the purpose and duration of different initiatives has everything to do with causing change with respect to the particular social issue at hand. However, GCMs are not based around single social issues, but rather align more broadly around core gospel values. Therefore GCMs can enjoy a deeper alignment in Christ, which is not necessarily issue specific, while envisioning a unity that will actually continue on eternally.

Notwithstanding these distinctions, there are nevertheless overlapping operational features with respect to the core conditions of CI and the ways in which GCMs are organized and function. Albeit with varying degrees of strength and development, each of the five conditions of CI were observable in the GCMs that were studied in this research project. On many occasions, it seemed that the GCMs were performing the organizational work of CI, without necessarily having the developed framework, disciplined structuring, and descriptive language of CI. In the following section, the research findings of this study are discussed in light of the five conditions of CI.

### **A Common Agenda**

From a CI perspective, a common agenda means procuring alignment around an agreed upon vision and strategy. More specifically, this means having a unified vision

for social impact, which includes possessing a shared understanding of the problem and developing agreed upon approaches and activities for solving the problem. By pursuing purposeful unity for city transformation, the GCMs included in this study demonstrated how they are working to formulate common agendas in the city contexts in which they are situated. Church unity was discussed by participants in terms of collaborative mission, and a “unity around purpose.” The participants in this study also described a collaborative process of working with civic leaders in order to more effectively serve their cities in specific ways. This process included GCM leaders carefully communicating and collaborating to procure buy in from civic leaders, so that they actually help frame and set the agendas for city service.

Participants in this study also spoke of GCMs as convening organizations, which help to mobilize local churches and nonprofits to more effectively engage their cities with the gospel. Part of the convening work that GCMs do is to help raise awareness of what others in the city are already doing. These efforts can in part be understood in light of CI’s goals to generate a greater collective impact over against an isolated impact.

In order to work towards developing common agendas, the GCMs in this study described how they carefully operate in a convening role so as to connect, collaborate, and celebrate ministry. The GCM leaders thus worked to frame commonly agreed upon areas of need in the city, along with shared outcome goals in central domains such as spiritual, social, and cultural. The collaborative principle for GCMs was for local churches and constituent groups to opt-in to the common agenda, in hopes of achieving greater collective impact. The opt-in method involved for GCMs follows the volunteer nature of church ministry. It also reflects a more decentralized structure of GCMs,

which are connected together more informally through core gospel values and relational trust rather than officially by formal arrangements typical of CI initiatives. Thus while the texture of alignment toward a common agenda is different with respect to CI and GCMs, there still remains a shared and underlying operating principle at work, which aims to secure an agreed upon vision and strategy so as to achieve greater outcomes. Both CI and GCMs are concerned with achieving a consensus buy in from participating organizations in order to embrace and embark upon a common agenda.

### **Shared Measurement System**

The idea of a shared measurement system includes using agreed upon ways for measuring and reporting results. As discussed in the literature review of CI, practicing a shared measurement system engenders a common language and enables greater organizational alignment, which can in turn lead to more effective results. In addition, shared measurement systems provide accountability to progressively move outcomes forward. For the GCMs included in this study, developing and using shared measurement systems was the weakest component with respect to the five conditions of CI. This could be stated more positively by suggesting that one of the greatest ways in which the organizational framework of CI might help to sharpen and strengthen GCMs is in the area of developing and using shared measurements.

Participants in this study acknowledged that practicing shared measurement systems “is the challenging piece. It is the biggest weakness. Because primarily I’m working with churches, the measurement piece is weak. I can’t get these guys to care about measurement” (GCM-2). This is not to say that measurements are not being done

at all. For example, participants cited how certain things were being measured, such as: “literacy rates and block parties” (GCM-2), “homeless veterans” (GCM-3), “school partnerships, and foster care” (GCM-1). Utilizing shared measurements was viewed by participants as something in which GCMs are trying to grow. It was noted by one GCM leader that measurements are “clearer when it comes to the serving side, but not as much with the evangelism side” (GCM-1). This participant shared some personal experience based on his involvement with the civic use of CI in public education. He stated his frustration that even after collecting all the measurements, it was difficult to tease out specific impact. This challenge could be even greater when considering how to measure spiritual indicators. However, this participant also reflected on how they are considering the possibility of starting to measure things like church planting and church attendance to develop better indicators of spiritual change.

With respect to developing shared measurement systems, the most exemplary GCM that was explored in this study was seeking to work with Barna research to help frame the direction and provide continuous measurement that tracks the movement’s progress. This GCM envisioned working with research and with churches to align the categories of inquiry with the proposed outcomes and activities of ministry; such as the spiritual, social, and cultural dimensions of a city. Based on Barna city research reports, this GCM made the goal of “moving from three percent evangelical Christian to six percent by 2020” (GCM-6).

### **Mutually Reinforcing Activities**

The main point of mutually reinforcing activities is to coordinate different activities and efforts together into a unified plan of action. Again, it is worth noting on this point that on one level GCMs are organizationally different than CI initiatives, in that they are more informally affiliated and concurrently focus on multiple issues instead of single issues. Even so, the operating principle of coordinating ministry efforts in such a way that they are mutually reinforced toward larger shared outcomes – is especially relevant for GCMs.

The participants in this study practiced this operational principle in several ways. For example, it was previously described in the research results how GCMs help local churches and nonprofits collaborate together for missional impact. Participants in this study also expressed how GCMs can contribute toward greater gospel mobilization in the city by enhancing the scalability of ministry. The concept of mutually reinforcing activities was specifically exemplified by GCMs in areas such as: sponsored church-school partnerships (GCM-1), a neighboring movement (GCM-2), and a tragic airport shooting (GCM-6).

### **Continuous Communication**

Continuous communication refers to the ongoing and consistent communication over time that builds trust and scaffolds new learnings, adaptations, and implementations of strategy. For CI initiatives, the condition of continuous communication occurs among the key participants within and across contributing organizations. For GCMs, continuous communication is conceived of as a central operational principle, which is especially

pertinent to the way in which communication flows between the main leadership groups of executive and associate leaders. As previously discussed in the research results, continuous communication also then flows from GCMs, to senior pastors and leaders, and then onto church and ministry members.

The principle of continuous communication was carefully managed by the GCMs that were explored in this study. Communication was intentionally pursued through larger conferences, different cycles of meeting times, monthly lunches, quarterly dinners, one-on-one connections, retreats, classes, social media platforms, and set times of prayer. The need to continually develop rhythms of purposeful communication was especially emphasized by the participants in this study.

Another important point of connection worth noting is that the idea of relational trust is cited in the CI literature as something so significant, that it can even have predictive power for collaboration.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, relationships are seen as providing bridges for difficult conversations, as they create a sense of shared purpose and security to help weather inevitable challenges. This point taken from the CI literature is remarkable to consider in light of the research findings from this present study, where GCM leaders articulated a deeply shared unity that is anchored by core gospel values. Furthermore, relational trust among leaders was demonstrated as the glue that sustains and perpetuates the growth of GCMs.

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca J. Gillam, Jacqueline M. Counts, and Teri A. Garstka, "Collective Impact Facilitators: How Contextual and Procedural Factors Influence Collaboration," *Community Development* 47, no. 2 (2016): 220

## Backbone Organization

The purpose of a backbone organization is to help coordinate the actions of all the participating organizations. For GCMs, the executive steering team can be properly understood as operating in the organizational space of a backbone organization. As reflected in the CI literature, backbone organizations serve as neutral conveners to coordinate activity, maintain accountability, and foster ownership.<sup>2</sup> Six specific activities were mentioned as essential functions of backbone organizations: (1) providing overall strategic direction, (2) facilitating conversations between partners, (3) managing data collection and analysis, (4) processing communications, (5) coordinating community outreach efforts, and (6) mobilizing funding.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, it was noted that successful backbone organizations are contextual-situational-specific, are able to secure adequate funding, and mobilize stakeholders.<sup>4</sup>

As indicated by the research results, the GCMs that were looked at in this study embraced a convening role that sought to connect, collaborate, and celebrate ministry. Operating in the space of a backbone organization, this was done in such a way that “the steering team is not very publically visible” (GCM-6). The purpose of GCMs is to help local churches and nonprofits collaborate together for missional impact. They also

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<sup>2</sup> John Kania and Mark Kramer, “Collective Impact,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Winter 2011): 40.

<sup>3</sup> Shiloh Turner, Kathy Merchant, John Kania, and Ellen Martin, “Understanding the Value of Backbone Organizations in Collective Impact: Part 2,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (July 18, 2012): 2-4.

<sup>4</sup> Fay Hanleybrown, John Kania, and Mark Kramer, “Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, (January 26, 2012): 14-18.

worked with civic leaders in order to serve the city in practical ways. While the missional efforts of the GCMs included in this study were more broadly cast than singular CI initiatives, all six of the essential functions of backbone organizations were performed by them.

The GCMs in this study practiced local orientation within the particular socio-cultural milieu of the city in which they were situated. This underlying approach was taken in order to most effectively and relevantly serve the city with the gospel. Furthermore, a central operational characteristic of GCMs was that they seek to mobilize local churches and nonprofits toward more effective gospel ministry in the city. This included coordinating ministry, raising awareness, assessing the city's needs, elevating vision, and helping to scale ministry.

On the question of funding, the GCMs that were included in this study were all over the map. Perhaps this represents the phenomena of how new they are in their present form and expression to the missiological landscape. Funding for GCMs was supplied by diverse sources, such as: independent organizations, private patrons, large megachurches, and support raising. The diversity of funding models was captured by one participant who reflected that: "The funding model for a city movement is the real sticking point in the movement." While the question of funding was variously represented in this study, nevertheless the GCM leaders, along with the core steering teams around them, were actively involved fundraising as an important backbone function.

Given this integrative discussion of CI and GCMs, in light of the key findings of this research project, several conclusions can be summarized. It is important to recognize



and appreciate the ways in which CI and GCMs are different. In this regard, there are points at which applying CI to GCMs might need qualification. However, based on this research study there does seem to be overlapping operational features from CI that can potentially inform and shape the ways in which GCMs are organized and function. From an organizational and operational perspective, it would seem that the CI model possesses a disciplined level of systematic collaboration that could be appropriately applied to GCMs – to help launch, sustain, and grow them. The five core conditions of CI thus comprise a strategic organizational framework that could be modified and utilized to enhance the growth and productivity of GCMs.

### **Implications for Ministry Practice**

This research study and its relevant findings have generated several important implications for ministry practice. The following five considerations are offered in light of this project's aim to explore the identity and organization of GCMs in the U.S.: (1) understanding GCMs as supernatural and natural response, (2) considering GCMs as revitalization movements, (3) appreciating the diversity and commonality of GCMs, (4) assessing what is currently needed in GCMs, and (5) advancing intentional conversation among GCMs.

### **Understanding GCMs as a Supernatural and Natural Response**

This study has attempted to highlight the dynamism of a sociological reality, as cities are rapidly growing and will continue to be the dominant space where the human race resides. Furthermore, cities hold particular social, cultural and spiritual powers that

have and will continue to require unique and particular responses from the Church. From Creation to the *Eschaton* the city has been fashioned as a potential tool of captivity, even from the first city of Cain to the proverbial Babylon to come. God's response of redemption and grace has not abandoned the city, but in fact is refashioning it into a perfect and holy place for the eternal habitation of His people. As God's people we have always been involved in this drama. It is challenging us to hold two ideas in mind simultaneously: once and future, now and not-yet. Within this tension we are called to live out the gospel. As Fleming Rutledge has so eloquently stated, "We are citizens of two worlds, or ages: this present evil age and the age to come, the commonwealth of heaven (Phil. 3:20). Our true home is in the future, but it is made present reality to us by the Holy Spirit, the guarantee of our redemption (Eph. 1:14 NRSV)."<sup>5</sup> We can no sooner escape the reality of the urban challenge than we can the inevitable role of the believer in the eschatological cosmos we inhabit. Our time, space and place have been assigned (Acts 17:26). As Fyodor Dostoevsky has observed, "God and the devil are fighting there, and the battlefield is the human heart."<sup>6</sup> This battle is also played out in the human city. As Keller also points out, "We are to see that, though the fight between these two kingdoms happens everywhere in the world, earthly cities are the flashpoints on the battle lines. The places where the fighting is most intense, there the war can be won."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Fleming Rutledge, *Advent: The Once and Future Coming of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), loc. 425, Kindle.

<sup>6</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: North Point Press, 1990), 102.

<sup>7</sup> Timothy Keller, "Understanding the City," New City Indy.org, <https://www.newcityindy.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/understanding-the-city.keller.doc>, accessed January 14, 2019.

In this study we have observed that through all of history God's people, in response to His Spirit's guidance and direction, have made missiological shifts in response to the realities that God's people have faced. Namely, "We do not live in a static state (faith or disbelief) but in a state of movement towards the future."<sup>8</sup> From Pentecost to the present we have witnessed that: "The Church cannot do without the constant renewal of its form. Renewal of form implies change of form by means of human decision and responsibility. Changing times demands changing forms."<sup>9</sup>

The changing times of our day and subsequent emergence of GCMs appears to be most needed and prescient in ratio to the size and progressive nature of the cities that are being impacted by globalization's socio-cultural and religious diversity and the pluralism and relativism that accompany it. This urban reality has seemingly always been a challenge to the homogeneity and suburban nature of American evangelicalism. Recent Barna Research indicates that the most post-Christian cities in America are in the Northeast – which are considered as the historical foundation and home-base of religion in America, where fully eight of the top ten most post-Christian cities are followed by the two big west coast hubs of San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose, and Seattle-Tacoma.<sup>10</sup>

As Christians face the reality of becoming minority populations and their historic influence and political power diminish in these central and futurist hubs, it appears that

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<sup>8</sup> Hans Kung, *The Church* (New York: Image Books, 1968), 341.

<sup>9</sup> Kung, *The Church*, 341.

<sup>10</sup> Barna Group, "The Most Post-Christian Cities in America: 2017," Barna.com, <https://www.barna.com/research/post-christian-cities-america-2017/>, accessed January 14, 2019.

the Holy Spirit is convicting and guiding the Church and Christian leaders to respond in a localized and united way in the form of GCMs. Earlier theological and ecclesiological divides that have historically fragmented a common Christian witness are being laid aside to address a more tangible and urgent response. The participants in this research project consistently expressed a theological conviction concerning church unity and God's heart for the city which fundamentally grounded their practice for purposeful unity. This is apparently fostering reformation in structural, relational, and functional ways. Perhaps most obviously is how consistently these movement leaders have embraced a fully holistic missiology that encompasses spiritual, cultural and social outcomes. This represents a redemptive contrast to the divisions that arose in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and historically have been woven through the conflictive texture of American Christianity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was amplified as the third major theme in this study, which indicated how GCMs seek to engage their cities with a holistic understanding and expression of the gospel. This theme was expressed in three discernable subthemes: (1) GCMs understand and express the gospel in both word and deed, (2) GCMs work with civic leaders in order to serve the city in practical ways, and (3) GCMs endeavor to maintain the evangelistic edge of the gospel. From the findings of this study, it appears that GCMs are a natural, spiritual and effective missiological response to the present realities facing major American cities, particularly in contexts with higher ratios of unchurched populations.

### Considering GCMs as Revitalization Movements

Although a rather recent phenomenon, GCMs appear to have attributes that could be perceived as a localized expression of antecedent movements that united the church in the organized revitalizations that re-shaped American Christianity towards tangible spiritual and social outcomes. The participants in this study consistently indicated that they were merely responding to the “already movement” that God had started. This is not unlike previous awakenings and revival movements highlighted as antecedent examples of the changing forms that the American Church has experienced throughout its history. This dynamic dance between God’s sovereign move and human agency are characteristic of how significant awakenings and revivals have occurred in our history. It hearkens to Finney’s assessment and warning we can stifle the advancement of the Church “whenever Christians get the idea that the work will go on without their aid and also conversely whenever Christians overestimate their own role and strength and “do not feel their dependence on the Spirit.”<sup>11</sup> Perhaps as suggested earlier in this study, the present heterogeneous character of American culture may not be able to substantiate a revitalization on a national scale to the magnitude that it did in a more homogenous context in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, but that perhaps more localized expressions such as those envisioned by GCM leaders may be attainable.

It appears that in the midst of a politically fueled national discourse, “Evangelicalism” has become an unwitting voice in the midst of the polarizing rhetoric. As indicated through this study’s research findings, GCMs appear to be desirous of

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<sup>11</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, “The View of Man Inherent in New Measures Revivalism,” *Church History* 45, Issue 2, (June, 1976): 206-221.

crafting a more positive common voice through a posture of humility and service that would position the Church for the common good of the City. The need for authenticity in a globalizing world has in turn resulted in a plea for localization. The unique local quality of cities requires a unique missiological response to particular city contexts. GCM leaders seem to be expressing the sentiment that to “experience a sense of uniqueness and particularity seems deeply rooted in human nature. With the decline of national attachments, the best place to look for a supplement (or a replacement) might be ‘down’ to the city rather than ‘up’ to the world.”<sup>12</sup>

This research study seems to reveal a more measured approach in attempting to understand what is happening in our cities, by discerning in community what the Spirit is directing the Church in the city to do in response. The process appears to be producing clear spiritual, social and cultural outcomes for the Church to pursue. This process is not unlike the intentionality of prior awakening and revivals that identified particular activities and outcomes to pursue in response to their realities. As Timothy Dwight, the primary catalyst for the Second Great Awakening expressed, their approach was intentional and calculated: “It was not a spontaneous upwelling of faith, but a calculated endeavor, planned and executed for conservative evangelicals.”<sup>13</sup> As McLoughlin also indicates:

The Great Awakenings were not brief outbursts of mass emotionalism by one group or another but profound cultural transformations... Awakenings begin in periods of cultural distortion and grave personal stress, when we lose faith in the legitimacy of our norms, the viability of our institutions, and the authority of our

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<sup>12</sup> Daniel A. Bell and Avner de-Shalit, *The Spirit of Cities: Why the Identity of a City Matters in a Global Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), xi.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Hartshorn Maxson, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies*, 1920, Reprint (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), x.

leaders in church and state. They eventuate in basic restructurings of our institutions and redefinitions of our social goals.

True revitalizations not only respond to and affect cultural shifts, but also reshape the Church's own practical ecclesiology and form. This appears to be happening in a more localized and measured way, in a growing post-denominational context, with the emergence of GCMs and the stated aspirations of the leaders interviewed in this study.

### **Appreciating the Diversity and Commonality of GCMs**

The results of this study have indicated that while GCMs exhibit distinctive local expressions they also share a high degree of similarity in their genesis, aspirations and organizational structure. On one hand, this study articulated a rich and nuanced diversity among GCMs with respect to how they began, the ways in which they presently function, and what they hope to achieve. However, it was also clear that a deep and underlying unity pervaded and wove together identifiable aspects of their shared identity. GCMs have emerged organically out of the felt needs that individual Christian leaders, guided by the Spirit, felt that their local context necessitates. The five themes of common identity and shared features that this study presents reveal a rich commonality in the ethos and corresponding mission, vision, and values of these independent city responses. From their theological vision at the most philosophical level and their operational response at the most practical level, a cohesive GCM pattern is clearly emerging.

The intense commitment to local orientation, Church unity, holistic outcomes, and inclusion of laity are challenging the existing theological, structural and relational make-up of the Church in these cities. These changes are testing the central operating

characteristics of how many churches, ministries, and even individual Christian leaders are prioritizing their time and resources in the cities where GCMs have started.

An encouraging observation of the study is that these local movements appear to be developing a contemporary response in alignment with the biblical theology of the city that is surveyed in Chapter Two. From Cain's original creation to Babylon's eventual destruction, the human city holds certain demands that attempt to dictate its citizenry. These values have always been contrary to Zion's Kingdom values. God's design and the observance of His truth over Cain's life is central to the spirit of the city. For the sake of the human city no one truth is absolute, but the pluralist mandate is needed to accommodate the harmony of many truths or a post-truth construct is preeminent. This is why, as D.A. Carson and Tim Keller explain, we face "a pluralism often mired in a swamp that cannot allow any firm ground for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. Such a stance has no place for truth that corresponds to reality, but merely an array of subjectively shaped truths."<sup>14</sup>

This is a particularly acute subject matter for these GCM leaders that see the need to build a more robust faith in the believers of their city that can stand up to the challenging epistemology that perhaps other contexts have presented. This echoes Newbigin's assessment of our times, that we "conceived of a 'secular society,' but it is not. It is a pagan society and its paganism, having been born out of the rejection of Christianity, is far more resistant to the gospel than the pre-Christian paganism with which cross-cultural missions have been familiar. Here surely is the most challenging

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<sup>14</sup> D.A. Carson and Tim Keller, *The Gospel as Center: Renewing our Faith and Reforming our Ministry Practices* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishing, 2012), 279.



missionary frontier of our time.”<sup>15</sup> As expressed by the participants in this study, these spiritual concerns are prompting leaders to ask “what is the lostness of our city?” as they seek to actually measure the spiritual faith of the Christian community in its scope and depth.

In Chapter Two, a biblical theology of the city also identified that the city’s growth is in correspondence to the individualistic need for purpose, “to make a name for themselves” (Gen 11:4) exemplified by Nimrod’s nihilism in the foundation of Babylon. GCMs’ aspirations are seeking to present a counter-cultural narrative for meaning found in a theology of hope in the Gospel and the transcendent belief in the City of God already present and still yet to come in full.

Meaningful work also emerged as a prominent consistent theme in this study. This theme highlighted the Church as God’s instrument of witness, not just through its preaching and proclamation, but through the lived-out realities of believers who are involved as a purposeful community in God’s present and future redemptive purpose. This found traction particularly in GCMs shared vision of tethering missional activity to the daily lives of the laity in their vocational and neighborly activities. This finding resonates with Newbigin’s contention to “de-clericalize” theology, which thereby calls the Church to equip believers to bring the gospel to bear on their secular responsibilities, including their workplaces and public square interactions.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 20.

<sup>16</sup> Bruce Ashford, “How a Man Named Leslie Changed the Way I Think,” The Gospel Coalition, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-a-man-named-lesslie-changed-the-way-i-think/>, accessed January 14, 2019.

Along with responding in the arena of faith and hope to the realities of man's city, there is a clear call from GCM leadership to be a loving community. The loneliness and anonymity caused by the modern city's breaking down of traditional tribal and familial affinity creates an opportunity for the Church to exhibit community that loves and cares for its' members, and tangibly provides services for the pain and brokenness that GCMs identify in their local contexts.

These Biblical responses of faith, hope and love in contrast to the city's values of pluralism, nihilism and anonymity are represented in similar, though not uniform language. In pursuing outcomes in the spiritual, social, and cultural domains GCM initiatives are pursuing the highest good for the city. GCM leaders identified spiritual metrics in the domain of faith activities attempting to measure outcomes in arenas of evangelism, discipleship, church-planting and church-growth. Social impact was characterized by discerning, usually under the council and advice of civic leaders, what the needs of the city might be in a wide variety of domains from homelessness to schools, to foster care, immigration issues, and many others. The Cultural Mandate was expressed by GCMs encouraging churches to mobilize congregants into multiple spheres of society in the arts, education, business, sports and others.

In various degrees the participating GCMs in this study appear to have identified many of the same operational characteristics essential to fulfilling the abovementioned mandates. Namely, adding value and mobilizing local churches and nonprofits in the city, identifying and equipping a GCM leadership champion, building a convening capacity to connect, collaborate, celebrate ministry, and by engaging in continuous rhythms of purposeful communication. What seems to be lacking is clear consensus around the

structures and principles that could best accommodate the similar aspirations and outcomes that GCMs hold in common.

### **Assessing What is Currently Needed in GCMs**

At these early stages of GCM evolution it appears that a more strategic intentionality towards discovering a common conceptual framework with accompanying best practices and measurable outcomes would be highly beneficial. As indicated in the results of this study, it seems that with varying degrees of confidence, GCMs have been pursuing their organizational work without necessarily using a coherently developed framework, disciplined structuring, and descriptive language which could benefit the ambitious transformational aspirations that GCMs express. While CI does not completely parallel the realities of GCMs, its basic structure and five corresponding principles share a basic operational congruency with respect to how GCMs function. These operational principles of CI could enhance how GCMs function and could be utilized for the future propagation, development, and efficacy of GCMs.

The primary distinctive of GCMs is birthed out of a theological conviction and practical missiological imperative of unity, which corresponds dynamically with the core ideology of CI which argues pragmatically that collective interventions are proven to be more fruitful than individual interventions. Beyond the CI principle of efficacy arises a deep spiritual conviction from GCMs that unity is a scriptural imperative. No matter how challenging, unity must be pursued. Beyond the practical considerations of a better ROI, social outcomes, or tangible results, biblical missiology demands unity. Whether the motivation is theological or sociological, GCMs are clearly stating that this type of unity

does not happen naturally but must be a disciplined and intentional exercise or churches will default back to an isolated and individualistic praxis that has been characteristic of historic American Church efforts. At a foundational level, there is a powerful corollary between the ethos of GCMs and CI. This human initiative calls for human response. As Kung has stated, “The reunion of the Churches cannot be decreed from above, it must grow up from below, from within both communities and individuals.”<sup>17</sup>

The first condition of CI, a common agenda, is clearly a bedrock and defining characteristic of GCMs, whose constituencies are desirous and willing to cooperate. The clarity and comprehension of a common agenda frames the context by which participants are willing to trust and commit to the process of collaboration. Collective Impact’s core values for developing and sustaining a common agenda do not only appear consistent with GCM ambitions, but the two resonant factors that CI contends for in establishing a common agenda could additionally help GCMs avoid some of the confusion and pitfalls that have been identified as viable threats. These two important steps, identifying the boundaries of the issue to be addressed, and developing a strategic framework to guide the activities of the initiative, could be hugely beneficial in focusing GCMs on the mandates that provide participants with the inevitable challenges that arise in the collaborative missionary enterprise. Stephen Neill’s principle that “when everything is mission, nothing is mission”<sup>18</sup> could well apply here. As CI extols, boundaries for collective initiatives are often flexibly defined, yet still enable greater clarity of focus by

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<sup>17</sup> Kung, *The Church*, 371.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Neill, *Creative Tension: The Duff Lectures* (London: Edinburgh House Publishers, 1959), 81.

delimiting the nature, scope, geography, and other variables of the problem. Identifying the constraints of boundaries enables strategic frameworks to be assembled.

The second area of concentration that CI advocates for, a shared measurement system, is the most obvious observable weakness and deficiency within GCMs.

Although both experts in the literature review of Chapter Three along with participating leaders in the research identified this as critical in validating the transformational propositions and statements that GCMs put forward in their mission and vision statements, there appears to be little accompanying consistency toward tangible measures that can be evaluated. Most of the GCM study respondents identified this as critical and yet expressed a weakness in their ability to establish or maintain the discipline in practice. The science of CI warns that without a shared measurement system, collaborative efforts tend toward shallowness. In contrast, implementing a shared measurement system can provide the accountability, credibility, and adoption of a common language which has proven to provide greater organizational alignment, and productive collaborative work that GCM leaders and proponents earnestly desire. Without measurable indicators it is difficult to imagine that GCMs will optimally succeed in ensuring a consistency in efforts and alignment among stakeholders.

The third principle of CI, mutually reinforcing activities, seems particularly applicable and germane to the success of GCMs. Having a coordinated set of differentiated activities through a conjoined plan of action seems to be even more essential with the vast diversity of the Church community that GCMs are aspiring to attract and mobilize. This principle celebrates that not all organizations can or should do the same thing, but rather by each church or ministry focusing on the specific areas of

engagement within their respective range of expertise and potential contribution, the combined outcome will actually be more effective. The GCM leadership in this study expressed this principle by stating that “pursuing a shared outcome does not require churches pursuing shared activities.” This gives latitude to the needed flexibility across the wide spectrum of theological, cultural, and sizes of churches and ministries that GCMs serve. At the same time, it ensures that the diversity of activities are anchored within a common agenda that ensues a coordinated response within the overarching and reinforcing approach to the outcome that participants themselves have highlighted as essential to contributing to the transformation of the city.

Continuous communication, as envisioned by CI, stresses ongoing and consistent communication over time as essential to the collaboration process. This principle is particularly necessary to build the trust that most GCM leaders in the study continually identified as perhaps the most essential element in sustaining and growing GCMs. Collective Impact further proposes that continuous communication scaffolds new learnings, adaptations, and implementations. From the study it is evident that this communication requires an intensive effort to use all possible means to maintain the social equity necessary to sustain the movement. In the literature review it was clear that the revitalizations propagated through the American Church awakenings and revitalization’s were intensely committed to the marketing of the movement – from Edwards to Finney to Seymour to Billy Graham. The utilization of popular communication tools was essential to maintain quality and impact. In the advent of the digital age it appears obvious and necessary that GCMs fully engage in the social media tools and platforms that direct the daily lives and activities of their constituencies.

Collective impact requires ongoing support by an independent staff dedicated to serving and managing the initiative. It appears that the health and impact of the GCMs explored in this study also validated this point. The strength and funding of GCMs as backbone organizations is thereby commensurate to their success and impact. Backbone organizations help to coordinate the actions of all the participating organizations involved in the CI program. The way in which backbone organizations are defined by CI seems to echo the aspirations of GCM leadership as they express the scope and ethos of facilitating organizational structures that they are endeavoring to build in service to the GCMs in their cities. Both CI and GCMs express a commitment to what may be described as servant leadership, fully engaged with high level strategic activities, but actualized through humble service rather than top down directives. This tension between authoritative, respected leadership with enough gravitas to catalyze major influencers within the Church and city, but exhibited by serving the least powerful participants of the movement within the city, seems to be a consistent requirement for effectiveness.

The six working principle identifiers that CI lists as the primary functions of an effective backbone organization also seem to mirror the identified activities that GCM leadership listed as critical, yet still lacking in the future development of their work. It is clear that providing overall strategic direction is concentrated in the variety of structures that GCMs have developed as a corollary to CI's backbone organization. However in order to administer these directives it would also seem that having full-time, rather than voluntary leadership, is essential. This is not unlike past revitalization movements. For example, the Urban Prayer Revival accelerated its momentum only after Jeremiah Lanphier was designated to work full-time on its propagation. The facilitation of

conversations between partners, managing data collection, processing communications, coordinating community outreach efforts, and mobilizing funding were all identified within the context of the work essential to GCMs. Just as in the variety of different structures identified within the GCMs included in this study, backbone organizations can also take on a variety of different organizational structures. However, there are definite and clear principles for success, along with general challenges, which if unattended to will lead to diminished success or failure.

A particularly observable concern in this study was the lack of clarity around the wisest funding model for the future sustainability and propagation of GCMs. Another important lesson that GCMs can learn from CI, is that the strength, resourcing, and robustness of a GCM will be commensurate to the investment made into the backbone organization that is essential in supporting it. As a new phenomenon, GCMs have not yet apparently captivated the needed attention of the Christian donor community to the degree that CI has engendered in social impact communities.

Based on the clear overlapping synergy between the research findings of this study and the principals of CI, GCMs could greatly benefit from this proven social sector conceptual framework to help improve existing movements and catalyze the inception of new ones. Although not a perfect corollary for reasons previously stated, CI structurally addresses almost every operational element identified by this research study.

### **Advancing Intentional Conversation Among GCMs**

It is yet to be seen whether the GCMs throughout the U.S. will choose to benefit from the rich resources provided through the social science of CI. However, this study



has made clear that more intentional discussions or even structured forums between leading GCMs could prove vastly beneficial. Not only would this aid in raising the missionary effectiveness of these individual movements, but it would also provide more coordinated efforts to propagate a national response to the inevitable growth of U.S. cities and their uniquely emerging challenges.

This study revealed a strong consensus around not only what is working well in GCMs, but it also highlights key challenges that GCMs seem to have in common. As indicated in this study, each GCM's pursuit of localization is central to each movements' contextualized success. However, as in any missionary endeavor that holds indigenous principals sacred, there are universal truths and best practices that need to be applied to optimize effectiveness. As in Bosch's presentation of the historical missionary paradigms that have guided the Church's mission in the world, there have always been guiding principles that were needed to help the Church thrive in every era and context. It will be the same in the urban reality that now confronts us. The broad theological , sociological, and practical principles that have been identified in this study and that perpetuate the core tenants of unified local collaborative responses known as GCMs, will continually need refining in their thinking and praxis.

What could immediately be undertaken is a deliberate action to more seriously coordinate the efforts of the most developed GCMs. There are three glaring observations from this study that warrant immediate coordination. First, a shared measurement construct could be created for use across all GCMs. This could eliminate the existing ambiguity and lack of resources committed to this seemingly essential element of GCMs and their potential success. In turn, developing a widespread shared measurement system

could conceivably benefit a second clearly observable need within GCMs, which is a more consistent funding model for the building and maintenance of the backbone organization that are paramount to GCMs' success. Third, in coordination with addressing these issues, distilled recommendations for best practices to existing and future GCMs could additionally provide immediate and necessary benefit.

### **Concluding Remarks**

If biblical history has taught us anything it is that God welcomes His people into His redemptive plan for His creation. As humanity's tide flows into the world's cities at exponential rates, God is on the move and He welcomes His people into the drama of preparing what was intended to captivate them and use it to unite, prepare and equip His people. The missiological partnership of God's sovereignty and human agency have always been the *modus operandi* for the establishment of His Kingdom. God chooses the weak to confound the wise, the humble to inherit the earth, and He unites His people as a foretaste of the oneness and togetherness that He has always intended. Unity in mission in our cities is essential to the eschatological unfolding of the *Missio Dei*, and the emergence of GCMs appears to be a natural response to the challenges that the Church of our day faces.

In these formative stages of development GCMs can benefit from considering the historical antecedents of how God's people responded to the moving of His Spirit through all of biblical and Church history with purpose and intentionality. These moments of revitalization and reformation have always been led by emerging leadership who were sensitive and discerning to the times and spaces they inhabited. New

ecclesiastical forms developed, fresh new missiology emerged, and new praxis established. These decisions, though Spirit led, were not made in isolation of human reason. They were not merely emotional reactions, but rather were proactive and thoughtful strategies formed in the midst of human experience and reality. God works out His plan through the socio-cultural milieu of every season of human history. Missiology does not exist in a vacuum, it is a living and breathing movement responding to the sociological challenges and opportunities that present themselves.

Could it be that the organizational, leadership, and management principles that have emerged out of CI be adopted by the Church towards the holy outcomes of providing the faith, hope and love that our cities so desperately are crying out for? The challenges that the 21<sup>st</sup> century city present to us are perhaps more daunting, complex, and spiritually powerfully than any frontier we have yet encountered. Indeed, this is the nature of Babylon. But Jesus' final appeal to his band of disciples was for unity: "... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). We can ill-afford to not pursue this unity mandate. To this end, every means of good practice can benefit in preparing His people in the cities of the world to be a living witness of Zion civicism, which exhibits our distinctive salt and light identity. The proliferation of GCMs is a manifest expression of Jesus' prayer for unity and mission being fulfilled in our day. By understanding GCM's shared identity and advancing how they are organized, we can further partner with the spreading of God's kingdom on earth, as it is in heaven (Matt 6:10).

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were several limitations of this study. At least three limitations warrant citation. First, this research project focused on the perceptions, experiences, thoughts, and lived experiences of the GCM leaders themselves. It did not triangulate these perceptions against the perceptions of pastors, the engaged laity, or other members that make up the movement. Thus, the results of this study are limited to the respective executive leaders own perceptions of GCMs and those which they lead.

Second, this study focused on a relatively small number of GCMs, which satisfied the purposeful selection criteria used in the research design. The common features that were identified from this study cannot be generalized to the hundreds of city movements that are currently happening, but may be most representative of those in a select group of large U.S. cities.

Third, the volume of collected data inhibited the totality of the participants' perceptions with respect to the research questions to be reported in the results. In this study, seven interview transcriptions generated about 500 pages of text. From this large amount of qualitative data, there were other concepts that emerged which are not reported in the results. This study only includes the most important and strongly supported findings with respect to the research questions. Additional findings that emerged as supplemental or infrequent, but are nevertheless important, could open up new directions for future research.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

This research project surfaced some important areas that merit further research. Three key areas for future research should be considered. First, a quantitative study that utilized the findings in this thesis to survey the hundreds of city movements currently operating in the U.S. would give a more robust picture of GCMs in a variety of demographic circumstances, and help promote a more generalized understanding of common features. Second, a deeper understanding of the role, challenges, and possible resistance to measurement among GCMs particularly in the area of evangelism might inform the conversation of why GCMs exist in aspiration and in practice. Third, given the variability of how GCMs are currently funded, future research could focus on different and potential new ways that funding models could be generated and sustained.

## **Summary**

The sociological vectors of urbanization, globalization, and pluralism have precipitated the rapid of emergence of GCMs as an important missiological construct. Since little formal research has been done on GCMs, this study built upon relevant literature from GCMs and CI, along with a biblical theology of the city, and conducted its own qualitative research to clarify the common identity and unique expressions of current largescale GCMs in the U.S. It also explored the potential viability of applying the organizational framework of CI to inform how GCMs are shaped and operate.

The participants of this study included seven executive GCM leaders representing best-in-class exemplars from diverse regions of current largescale GCMs in the U.S. A phenomenological qualitative research method utilized in-depth interviews to explore the

research questions. Data analysis revealed five major themes that demonstrate the common identity and shared features of GCMs: (1) GCMs practice local orientation within particular city contexts, (2) GCMs share purposeful unity for city transformation, (3) GCMs engage their cities with a holistic gospel, (4) GCMs incorporate the laity as integral to the movement, and (5) GCMs express central operating characteristics. These research findings were also discussed in light of the core operational conditions of CI, indicating how CI might be utilized as a strategic organizational framework to enhance the growth and effectiveness of GCMs.

Based on this research project, five areas of implications were suggested for present-day GCMs: (1) understanding GCMs as supernatural and natural response, (2) considering GCMs as revitalization movements, (3) appreciating the diversity and commonality of GCMs, (4) assessing what is currently needed in GCMs, and (5) advancing intentional conversation among GCMs.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Letter of Invitation to Research**

Greetings, (Participant's name)!

I hope you are well. As we have discussed previously, I am writing to schedule a time for my research team to meet with you, and any key staff members, in order to interview you on (name of particular GCM). Along with you I will be interviewing several city movement leaders in order to better understand the elements of your city-movement structures and your definitions of success. It is my belief that gospel-city movements have similar characteristics but there has been inadequate research to identify the key foundational principals that apply to all of them and lack of a robust methodology to properly manage and measure their outcomes. This research project will address what are the core features of city-gospel movements in the United States and the viability that collective impact might have as an effective methodology which can be leveraged to strategically catalyze and sustain city-gospel movements.

(Participants name), as one of the key national leaders in this space I would love to kick off the interviews with you. For taking the time to participate you will receive a copy of the research along with key findings including recommendations for the application of the Collective Impact Model. It is my sincere desire that this research will inform, strengthen and perhaps inspire city movements in the U.S., and ultimately across the globe.

The structure of the interviews will be as such:

- Our research team would like 90-120 minutes with you and the key person (people) that execute the communication and logistics of the movement.
- We want to conduct these interviews on Zoom so multiple people can attend regardless of geographic location. You will need to download the free version and then our lead researcher will send an invite with information on how to join the call.
- We would also like to ask for a 15 min. follow up to the first conversation if needed for clarification after all interviews are conducted.

I am hoping to schedule the interviews as soon as possible in order to complete them all in the next few months. The earlier you can schedule your interview date the easier it will be to have the interviews completed by the end of September. I understand you are very busy and appreciate your taking time out of your schedule to be the first participant in our interview process. I have attached a copy of the Interview Questions which serve as a base and may give rise to others based off answers.

There is also a list of dates that our research team is available. I have copied (name of lead researcher) on this email and ask that you please respond back to her directly with any of the below dates you are available.

**Available Interview Dates:**

July 5-6

July 12-13

July 17-21

July 24-28

Please let me know if you would like any additional information or have any questions.

Your Partner in World Mission,

Rob

*Rob Hoskins*

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## **APPENDIX B**

### **Informed Consent Form**

Project Title: An Exploratory Study on the Identity and Organization of Gospel City Movements in the United States

Principle Investigator: Rob Hoskins

Seminary: Gordon-Conwell Theological

Dear (Participant),

This letter is to request your participation in a study of gospel city movements (GCMs). The purpose of this study is to examine the core structure and activity of leading GCMs in the U.S. In addition, it will explore the viability of using Collective Impact as a model to strengthen and clarify the overall function of GCMs. You can learn more about the Collective Impact Model at: [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective\\_impact](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact). The results of this study will be used to help provide strategic guidance for GCMs to persist, grow, and potentially be even more effective. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. You may ask any questions about the research, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else that is unclear about the research.

You are one of seven key city movement leaders being asked to participate in this study. Your participation will be incredibly valuable. You have been selected because the movement you lead is recognized by your peers as both significant and effective.

This is a qualitative study, data will be collected via interviews. The interviews will last from one to two hours. They will be scheduled over the next several months at a time convenient for you and your staff. The topics for the interview and some sample questions will be sent prior to the interview so that you may determine if there are other members of your team that you would like to participate in the interview process. You will be invited to participate in a zoom call which will be recorded for data collection purposes if you grant permission. No recording will take place without the consent of participants. Recordings will be shared with you upon request. A follow up phone call of no more than 15 min. will be reserved to clarify any lingering questions about the data collected. Responses from interviews will then be analyzed both individually and collectively using a qualitative analysis software. All key findings will be shared with the participants of the study by March of 2018.

All participating organizations will be guaranteed anonymity in the report of the study. Any identification information will be used for data analysis purposes only. Each organization will be given access only to their own information both for review and for internal conversations.

Participation in this study will bring benefit both to you personally and to the broader landscape of GCMs. Gospel-city movements have similar characteristics but there has been inadequate research to identify the key foundational principals that apply to all of them and a lack of robust methodology to properly manage and measure their outcomes. This research project will address what are the core features of GCMs in the U.S. and the viability that Collective Impact might have as a methodology which can be leveraged to strategically catalyze and sustain them.

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to take part, or if you stop participating at any time. Any data collected from the participant prior to their withdrawal will only be used with the expressed permission of the participant.

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: (Name and phone number of lead researcher), email: (email address of lead researcher). If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Co-Chair of the Institutional Review Board, David A. Currie, at: dcurrie@gordonconwell.edu; 978-646-4176.

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (printed):

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(Signature of Participant)

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(Date)

I have discussed the above points with the participant. It is my opinion that the participant understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in this research study.

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(Signature of Researcher)

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(Date)

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Interview Question Protocol**

#### **Vision and Common Agenda:**

1. How you have mobilized churches with this vision and also how do you bring government, business and other partners to the table? (communicating the vision for catalyzing churches and including other entities)
2. What is the greatest lesson you could share about beginning a gospel city movement?
3. If you could start over what might you do differently?
4. Beyond hearing from the Mayor was there other information you used to determine the agenda for the Portland movement?
5. How do you currently determine the agenda for the movement? Is there one overarching agenda or are there many agendas?
6. How are priorities or initiatives decided upon for the movement?
7. Is there a leadership team or is it a partnership of equals?
8. Are there regular meetings among the drivers for the movement?
9. Who convenes these meetings?
10. Who is a part of this leadership team (or partnership) and what organizations do they represent?

#### **Backbone Organization:**

1. Is there a steering committee for the movement? If so how did it develop?
2. Is there a designated staff for the movement? If so who funds them and what are their roles? (Communication, data tracking, convening...)
3. Whose role is it to drive communication about the movement to current participants and to invite new participants?
4. Are there costs involved in the initiatives of the movement and if so how are they funded?

5. What do you see as the greatest challenge to sustaining this movement?

#### Shared Measurement:

1. Is there one shared measurement of success for this movement? I did see on your website the number of volunteers that were mobilized. Are there other measures that are movement wide?
2. Was any baseline data collected on this before the movement began?
3. Have you tracked any milestones in this movement?
4. Thinking about each of the initiatives on the website- Do they each have measurable goals that they track?
5. In what other ways are the goals measured and communicated? (I noticed stories in the form of short video clips and blog posts as well as links to articles. These are all great ways to get qualitative data.)
6. Beyond the qualitative data such as stories are there any sources of quantitative data that are used and regularly communicated?

#### Reinforcing Activities:

1. What issues are the easiest for people to coalesce around?
  - How do you determine which initiatives to promote?
  - How is it determined who to invite to the initiative?
2. Beyond the leaders – describe the partners and volunteers that make this movement work.
3. Has the makeup of partners and volunteers changed over time? Tell me about that.
4. Of all you have done, what seems to have gotten the most natural traction?
5. Were you able to measure it?

#### Continuous Communication:

1. Tell me something about the cycle of communication in this city movement.

- How does the leadership communicate with one another?
  - What forms – meeting, writing?
  - How often?
  - Who initiates it
2. How do partners communicate to movement leadership?
  3. How does the movement communicate to volunteers?

Primary Agenda/Primary Process:

1. If this movement could accomplish just one thing- what would you want it to be?
2. What is the greatest strength of this movement and how could others learn from it?

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## VITA

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Years of D.Min. Work: Three (3) | Expected Graduation: May 2019

### ***Professional Ministry Experience:***

#### **OneHope, Inc., Pompano Beach, FL, 1989 - Present**

*President and CEO*, 2004 – present: Expanded OneHope's ministry into 180+ countries and 200+ languages. | Moved OneHope into multiple medium; e.g.: film, mobile apps, trading cards, orality, online, sports camps and mobile. | Developed and implemented outcome-based ministry conceptual framework for development, evaluation, and measurement of children / youth with scripture engagement programs. | Developed Vision 2030 Initiative, a strategic plan to reach every young person in every nation with a relevant Gospel message by the year 2030. | In 2007 commissioned and consulted on a 44-country research initiative *Spiritual State of the World's Children*, of over 150,000 young people, enabling OneHope to customize scripture programs. | Launched Bible App for Kids, now in 50+ languages and downloaded by more than 25 million children.

**General Council Assemblies of God, 1986 – present:** Licensed to Preach, 1986 – 1988 | Ordained Minister, 1988 – present | Appointed Missionary, 1992 – present

### ***Boards and Committees:***

**Oral Roberts University, 2008 – 2017:** Chairman of Board Elect, 2013 – 2017 | Board Vice Chair, 2013 – present | Chairman of Leadership committee, 2013 – present | Board of Trustees, 2008 – 2017 | Chairman of Development Committee, 2008 – 2013

**Global Evangelism Network, 2012 – present:** Leader, Evaluations Initiative, 2012 – present | Member, City Movements Initiative, 2012 – present

**Lausanne Strategy Working Group, 2011 – 2016:** Member Executive Committee, 2011 – present | Chairman, 2015 – 2016

**Visual Story Network, 2007 – present:** Co-Founder | Member Executive Committee

**Forum of Bible Agencies, 1992 – present:** Member of Executive Committee, 1998 – 2011 | Chair of Search Committee, 2007 | Chairman of North America, 1998 – 2004 | Chairman of Latin America, 1994 – 1998

**4/14 Movement, 2009 – present:** Launching Steering Committee, 2009

**Empowered21, 2008 – present:** Executive Committee of Global Board, 2008 – present

### ***Recognitions and Awards:***

John Maxwell Leadership Award, 2005 | Named as one of 21 emerging leaders of the Church in Charisma Magazine, 2010